

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*Epic of a
Sir Galahad
of the
Cow Country*

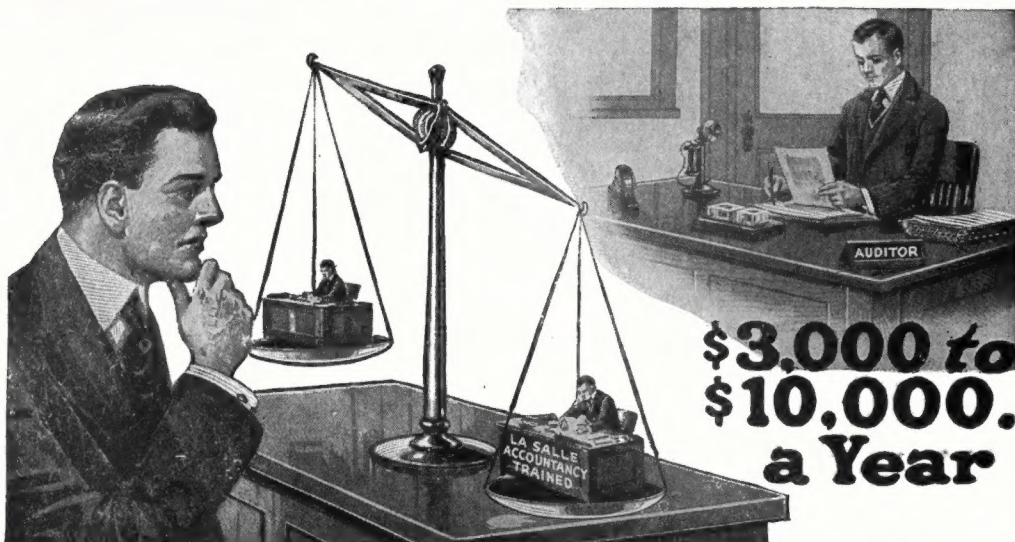


*Evelyn Campbell's
The Knight of Lonely Land*

10¢ PER
COPY

JANUARY 15

BY THE YEAR \$4.00



The Accountancy Trained Man Wins!

Every ambitious man strives for three things: First, promotion; second, increased salary; third, larger business success.

In the race for these things the man thoroly trained in Higher Accountancy has a tremendous advantage over the untrained man because the Accountancy expert is capable of improving his employer's system of bookkeeping and cost accounting. He is able to warn his firm of approaching dangers from increased costs and decreased profit. He knows every minute just where each department stands in relation to production, cost and profit.

Today business does not pick men for advancement for any other reason than that they have acquired specialized knowledge and training which fits them for important duties. And LaSalle is training nearly 50,000 ambitious men every year for bigger, better positions.

The course is under the personal supervision of William B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., former Comptroller and Instructor, University of Illinois; Director of the Illinois Society of Certified Public Accountants, and of the National Association of Cost Accountants, assisted by a large staff of Certified Public Accountants, including members of the American Institute of Accountants. You will be thoroly trained in the same methods which these men use in their work.

You will be trained by the famous LaSalle "Problem Method" by which you actually work out for yourself every kind of problem entering into the duties of an Expert Accountant. In effect you are taken behind the scenes of big business and into every department. Your training in this connection is under conditions which approach as nearly as possible those which would exist were you actually at the desk and on the high-salaried Expert Accountant's job you are training to fill.

LaSalle training will give you a mastery of the underlying principles of Modern Business Analysis, Organization, Accounting, Auditing, Cost Accounting, Commercial Law, Income Tax work, etc. LaSalle accountancy training will enable you to pass C. P. A. examinations, to hold a high-salaried

executive position with a business organization, or to enter business for yourself as an Expert Consulting Accountant.

And—after you have finished your training in these subjects you are privileged to take, without additional cost, any of the LaSalle Elective Courses specializing in the accounting practice of any particular kind of business—Public Service Corporations, Educational Institutions, Iron and Steel Companies, Insurance, Transportation, or of any other business or industry.

Investigate this attractive and well paid field for specialized ability. Fill in and mail the coupon today. We will send you full particulars explaining the LaSalle "Problem Method" of home-training in Higher Accountancy. We will also send a copy of the famous book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One"—a book which tells how men with the aid of LaSalle training have gained in one year promotion which men without this training have not realized in ten. Send for your copy now!

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World

Dept. 132-HR Chicago, Illinois

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

☐ Higher Accountancy Training for positions as Auditors, Comptrollers, Certified Public Accountants, Cost Accountants, etc.

Other LaSalle Training Courses

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If interested in any of these courses, check here:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Business Management | ☐ Banking and Finance |
| ☐ Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic | ☐ Bookkeeping |
| ☐ Law—Bar, LL. B. Degree | ☐ Commercial Spanish |
| ☐ Commercial Law | ☐ Business Letter Writing |
| ☐ Personnel and Employment Management | ☐ Public Speaking |
| ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency | ☐ Business English |
| | ☐ Coaching for C. P. A. and Institute Examinations |
| | ☐ Modern Foremanship |

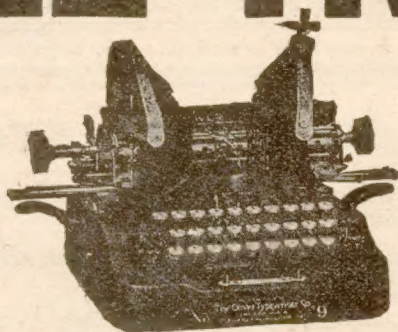
Name

Present Position

Address

FREE TRIAL

Keep It
For \$4.00 per Month



Or Return It
At Our Expense

The Oliver Typewriter—Was \$100—Now \$64

The Guarantee of a \$2,000,000 Concern that it is the Identical Model

Be your own salesman and save \$36. You get the identical typewriter formerly priced \$100—not a cent's alteration in value. The finest, the most expensive, the latest Oliver Model. Old methods were wasteful. During the war we learned that it was unnecessary to have great numbers of traveling salesmen and numerous, expensive branch houses throughout the country. We were also able to discontinue many other superfluous, costly sales methods. You benefit by these savings.

Brand New—Never Used

Do not confuse this with offers of earlier models, rebuilt or second-hand. Note the signature of this advertisement. This is a \$2,000,000 concern.

We offer new Olivers at nearly half price because we have put typewriter selling on an efficient, scientific basis.

You now deal direct—sell to yourself, with no one to influence you. This puts the Oliver on a merit test.

The entire facilities of this Company are devoted exclusively to the production and distribution of Oliver Typewriters.

You Save \$36

This is the first time in history that a new standard \$100 typewriter has been offered for \$64. Remember, we do not offer a substitute model, cheaper nor different. But the same splendid Oliver used by the big concerns. Over 800,000 Olivers have been sold.

We ship direct from the factory to you, No money down—no red tape. Try the Oliver Nine at our expense. If you decide to keep it, send us \$4.00 per month. If you return it, we even refund the outgoing shipping charges. You are not placed under the slightest obligation. That's our whole plan. We rely on your judgment.

We know you don't want to pay double, and who wants a lesser typewriter? You may have an Oliver for free trial by checking the coupon below. Or you may ask for further information.

An Amazing Book

All the secrets of the typewriter world are revealed in our startling book entitled "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy"—sent free if you mail the coupon now. Also our catalog. Order your free trial Oliver or ask for further information at once.

Canadian Price \$82

The OLIVER Typewriter Company

731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago

NOTE CAREFULLY—This coupon will bring you either the Oliver Nine for free trial or further information. Check carefully which you wish.

Mail
This Coupon
Now!

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY

731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay \$64 at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is
This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your deluxe catalog and further information.

Name

Street address

City State

Occupation or business

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIX

CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 15, 1921

NUMBER 4

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

The Knight of Lonely Land	Evelyn Campbell	433
A Five-Part Story — Part One		
Tiger	Max Brand	460
A Six-Part Story — Part Two		
Listening Eyes	Bertram Lebhar	506
A Six-Part Story — Part Three		
Once a Plumber—	Edgar Franklin	527
A Five-Part Story — Part Four		
The Buster	William Patterson White	553
An Eight-Part Story — Part Five		

NOVELETTE

East Is Not West	Rex Parson	484
A Two-Part Novelette — Part Two		

FIVE SHORT STORIES

His Terrible Dawn	William Merriam Rouse	453
Two Women	Jack Bechdolt	474
The Policy Sleuth	Edgar Wallace	521
No. 4—A RACE AT OSTEND.		
The Star Part	Raymond Lester	544
Unsophisticated	Clinton Dangerfield	573

DETECTIVE STORIES ARE ALWAYS POPULAR. SOME ARE BETTER
THAN OTHERS. IN THE *BEST* CLASS YOU WILL FIND

THE HOLE IN THE FRAME

BY MAXWELL SMITH

PUBLISHED AS A COMPLETE NOVELETTE IN OUR NEXT WEEK'S
ISSUE. DON'T MISS IT.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1921

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

A House Given Away!



COSTS NOTHING TO INVESTIGATE
WHEN I SAY FREE—I MEAN FREE!

You Can Have It Built Anywhere

**I DO NOT WANT ONE CENT
 OF YOUR MONEY**

This offer is so liberal it is hard to believe, but it is true—every word is true. There are no strings to my offer and I will positively give this home away just as promised in this offer. You can get a home free if you send me your name quick and do as I say. I have given away many of these houses and I will give away many more, just to advertise my business. You can have the next house I give away if you send me your name and address and do as I tell you.

STOP PAYING RENT

You can have the next house I give away if you rush your name and do as I say. Surely you have longed for the day to come when you could cease paying rent to a heartless landlord, and call your home your own. I am now offering you the golden opportunity to free yourself from the clutches of the money-grabbing landlord, and at no cost to yourself. Picture a handsome six-room house, nice lawn and pretty shrubbery and flowers growing in well-arranged beds. Don't you want a place like this, and free, too? Of course you do, so send me your name today—before you lay this magazine aside.

This Is a Golden Opportunity for "Argosy-Allstory Weekly" Readers

This House Can Be Built Anywhere You Want It. Don't hold back—don't say "no such luck for me." You can have the house built wherever you say—California, Maine or anywhere in the United States. It makes no difference where you want to live. This offer is open to all.

Rush This Coupon →

Fill out the coupon and rush it to me, or a post-card will do. Be the very first to get my big free offer.

**C. E. MOORE, President
 HOME BUILDERS' CLUB**

300 Batavia Avenue, Batavia, Ill.

—FREE HOME COUPON—

C. E. MOORE, President, Home Builders' Club
300 Batavia Avenue, Batavia, Ill.

I want the very next house you will give away. Send me free floor plans and full particulars. I am to run no risk.

Name.....

Street or R. F. D.....

Town.....

State.....

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN: EARN \$3,500 TO \$10,000 A YEAR. City or Traveling. Experience unnecessary. Quickly qualify through our amazing System. Free Employment Service to Members. Send for Salesmanship book, list of lines and full particulars. Nat. Salesmen's Tr. Ass'n., Dept. 133-A, Chicago, Ill.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED. You can earn \$50.00 a week during spare time and your own clothes free by taking orders from our all wool Spring line of guaranteed tailoring. Our line is the largest and cheapest. Pre-war prices. Jay Rose & Co., 415 S. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: WIRELESS UMBRELLA. I am paying \$2 an hour, taking orders for this newest invention. Send for 5-part outfit. Six inch midget demonstrator free. Parker Mfg. Co., 306 Pike Street, Dayton, Ohio.

MEN WANTED-TO SELL "PERRY" DEPENDABLE FRUIT TREES AND SHRUBBERY. Big demand. Complete cooperation. Commission paid weekly. Write for terms. Perry Nurseries, Brighton, N. Y.

AGENTS-LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 593 Broadway, New York.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

BIG PROFITS IN SALESDOARDS. We will start you in this business for yourself. Absolutely no investment required. Novelty Jewelry Co., Dept. A, 118 N. LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS-MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

\$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE-IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mesd Company, Dept. 301, Chicago.

WE WANT REPUTABLE SALES REPRESENTATIVES, wherever we have no dealer distribution, to sell U. S. Player Rolls in their spare time. A high-grade business with good profits. United States Music Co., 2929 W. Lake St., Chicago.

WE PAY \$8 A DAY TAKING ORDERS FOR INSIDE TYRES. Guaranteed to prevent punctures and blowouts. Double tire mileage. Any tire. Tremendous demand. Low priced. Write quick for agency. American Accessories Co., B201, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different, unique, enormous demand-50 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS-Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

SELL WORLD'S GREATEST AUTO INVENTION: No more rain blurred windshields; Mystic Chemical Film works wonders; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours; steel mountings; fits pocket; whirlwind seller at \$1; Vetter made \$75 first day. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 309, Toledo, Ohio.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS-YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Company, Department 813, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Positions worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 771 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

YOU CAN MAKE FROM \$25 TO \$75 PER WEEK DURING YOUR SPARE TIME by addressing envelopes. Not over \$10 capital required. Particulars free. McIardie & Myers, 424 Dakota, Dayton, Ohio.

REAL ESTATE-MICHIGAN

A REAL OPPORTUNITY calls you to Antrim and Kalkaska Counties, Michigan. Raise big crops on our hardwood lands. Close to markets, schools, railroad. Only \$15 to \$35 per acre. Easy terms. We help settlers. Write for big free booklet. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

START AN EASY AND LUCRATIVE BUSINESS. We teach you how to establish a successful collection agency and refer business to you. No capital required. Little competition. Wm. P. Taylor, Buffalo, N. Y., writes: "Made gross commissions of over \$8,000.00 in 1918 and one day recently showed commissions of \$165.00." O. H. Overholser, Dayton, Ohio, writes: "Averaged over \$350.00 net monthly commissions last year." Start now in spare time. You can achieve the same success as 4,300 others. Write today for free "Pointers" and new plan. American Collection Service, 779 State Street, Detroit, Mich.

HELP WANTED

BE A DETECTIVE-EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, \$140-\$200. Colored Porters by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Ry. Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

BE A DETECTIVE-BIG PAY: EASY WORK; great demand everywhere; fine chance for travel; experience unnecessary; we show you. Write for free particulars. Write, Wagner, 186 East 79th Street, New York, Dept. 302.

MEN WANTED FOR DETECTIVE WORK. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former U. S. Govt. Detective, 107 St. Louis, Mo.

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

WOMEN, GIRLS, 15 UP. BECOME DRESS AND GOWN DESIGNERS. \$150 month. Learn easily while earning. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. F-945, Rochester, N. Y.

AUTHORS-MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS-a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

WANTED: COMPOSERS OF VERSE OR MUSIC to write at once. Brilliant opportunity for good talent. Address, Burrell Van Buren, 1-12 Bush Temple Bldg., Chicago.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED. BIG PRICES PAID. YOU CAN WRITE THEM. We show you how. Experience unnecessary. Easy, fascinating way to earn money in spare time. Get free details. Rex Publisher, Box 175, M-12, Chicago.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 650 F. Washington, D. C.

PATENTS-Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Concealment Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE A SONG POEM-I compose music and guarantee publication. Send poem today. E. Hanson, 3810 Broadway, Room 118, Chicago.

WRITE A SONG POEM-LOVE, MOTHER, HOME, COMIC or any subject. I compose music and guarantee publication. Send words today. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

WANTED TO BUY

MAIL DIRECT TO THE REFINERS ANY OLD GOLD, SILVER, MAGNETO POINTS, old watches, diamonds, platinum, old or broken jewelry, false teeth, gold or silver ores or nuggets, War Bonds and Stamps. Send them to us today. Highest prices paid in cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied. The Ohio Smelting & Refining Co., 254 Lennox Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

\$10,000 Gone!

JOHN and Jim Doe sneaked into the bank and no one saw them—they drilled nice, neat holes into the safe but made no noise. They poured in the “dope,” touched off the fuse, and—!!!

The safe was blown to smithereens! Jim put the \$10,000.00 in his pocket. They got out and not a soul woke up. *But*, they left their



They were the telltale evidence. Jim and John are locked up and the bank has its \$10,000.00 back.

Better still, Smith and Brown, finger print experts, got all the reward for their capture. Why didn't you? Because you don't know beans about finger prints. You can't even make a bid for this big money. If you ever want to put a feather in your cap—if you want to get your share of the big rewards and get into the big money class—



Send for This **Free Book** on Finger Prints!

Sent absolutely free and prepaid. It tells you exactly how you can learn this fascinating profession in your spare time at home. It is the best course in the country today. Remember, you do not have to give up your present position. You can learn it during your spare time. Finger prints are the best means of identification known today. Get out of the rut and be somebody! Find out about the opportunities that await you in this new profession. Give up a few minutes of your spare time now and have hours of leisure later on. Get a hump on yourself. The only way you can hope for success is to “get next!” to your opportunities. Here's your chance. Put your name on the coupon below. Or, even a letter or postal card will do.

Remember, this book does not place you under any obligation whatever. It is sent to you free and prepaid (in plain envelope). Don't even enclose stamp. All that is necessary is your name and address. (Office or residence.) Send the coupon today—now!

University of Applied Science

Desk 1081 1920 Sunnyside Avenue — Chicago, Illinois

**University of
Applied Science
Desk 1081**

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Please send me FREE and postpaid
your book on Finger Prints and de-
tails of your offer.

Name.....

Address.....

Age..... Occupation.....



Free Proof that I Can Raise Your Pay

No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make \$100—\$200, and in one case as high as \$2,000 weekly. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I know what poverty is. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did. I've known the bitterest kind of want.

But to-day all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship. Few people have more of the blessings of the world than I.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." It had to do with getting ahead and growing rich. He had used it himself with remarkable results. He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret,"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. Worse

than that, for I was several thousand dollars in the hole. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work.

At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. I was thrilled with a new sense of power. Things I couldn't do before became as easy for me to do as opening a door. My business boomed and continued to leap ahead at a rate that startled me. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health or any of the good things of life.

That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. One by one people came to me and asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. In one case I took a rank failure and in a few weeks had him earning as high as \$2,000.00 a week. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with

it, barely eking out a living. To-day this young man is worth \$200,000. He is building a \$25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling, whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who a few years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work—in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were \$20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to \$40,000. And this genial 64-year young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes

useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstances—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

A Few Examples

Personal Experiences

Among over 400,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex. U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britz; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Gov. Ferris of Michigan; and many others of equal prominence.

\$300 Profit from One Day's Reading

"The result from one day's study netted me \$300 cash. I think it a great book and would not be without it for ten times the cost."—Col. A. W. Wilkie, Roscoe, So. Dakota.

Worth \$15,000 and More

"The book has been worth more than \$15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard.

Would be Worth \$100,000

"If I had only had it when I was 20 years old, I would be worth \$100,000 today. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milans, Tex.

Salary Jumped from \$150 to \$800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from \$150 to \$800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

From \$100 to \$3,000 a Month

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from \$100 a month to \$3,000 the first month, and won a \$250 prize for the best salesmanship in the state."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer. You can easily make thousands—you can't lose a penny.

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over 400,000 others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only \$4.00 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a four dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY

54-A Wilcox Block

Meriden, Conn.

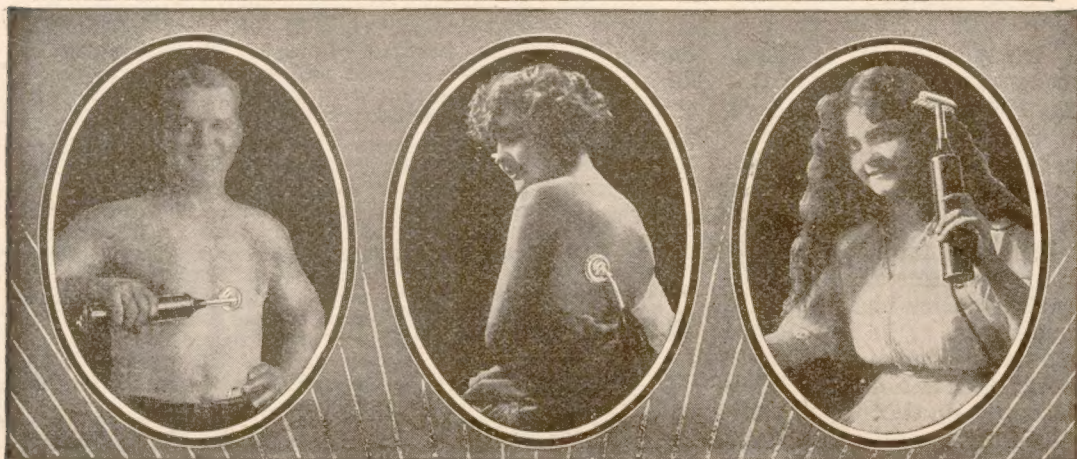
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,

54-A, Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit \$4.00 or return the book to you in five days.

Name.....

Address.....



AN ELECTRIC RAY

*The Sensation of the Recent
"Health Show" at Chicago.*

HEALTH—VITALITY—BEAUTY

Positively Quickly and Inexpensively Yours.

At last there is a quick and inexpensive way to radiant beauty—glowing health—pulsing vitality. Electricity in its most scientific and efficient form for the human system. A wonderful Violet Ray of tremendous curative power. Not a Vibrator—not a current to shock you—not a massaging device. A powerful penetrating **Ray of Energy** that heals—beautifies—rejuvenates and energizes. It was the big sensation of the Health Show recently held at Chicago. Endorsed by every doctor, scientist—Physical Culture and Beauty expert. Use it in the privacy of your home. **Be Healthy—Be Beautiful—Be Vital and Compelling.**

Try VI-REX RAYS 10 Days Free

Better than gallons of liniment and drugs. Better than a ton of cosmetics. Vi-Rex treatments now used at home by thousands. *Remarkable records made in cases of neuritis, rheumatism, asthma, catarrh, deafness, insomnia, obesity, nervousness, lumbago, pains, as well as in cases of skin trouble, sallowness, pimples, blackheads, falling hair.*

Try the Vi-Rex Violet Ray machine in your own home on our 10 day offer. Attach to any electric light socket or use Battery Outfit Complete. No shock. No vibration. Harmless even to infants. Soothing or stimulating as desired. Electricity in its most helpful, healing, soothing form. *Creates energy, strength, vigor and beauty.*

WRITE NOW FOR STARTLING BOOK FREE

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO.

Dept. 93

326 W. Madison Street, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me your free book and particulars of your Trial Offer of the Vi-Rex Violet Ray Machine.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Just write postal or mail coupon for wonderful free 52 page book explaining in detail. Read how Violet Rays massage every cell in the body. Read letters from users. See what physicians, sanatoriums, home users say.

Why suffer? Why be satisfied with less than your full share of health and beauty? See what wonderful Violet Rays will do for you.

Mail coupon or write postal for free book and 10 days Trial Offer. Do not miss this offer. Address NOW.



VI-REX ELECTRIC CO.

Dept. 93, 326 W. Madison Street, Chicago, Ill.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIX

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 1921

NUMBER 4

The Knight of Lonely Land by Evelyn Campbell

Author of "Spark of the Flame," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE BRITCHES.

WHEN he reached the high point of the trail from which the whole valley could be seen, he drew his horse to a standstill so that he might look at what to him was more beautiful than a picture painted upon canvas. His face had a sort of dreamy reverence that softened its grim lines as though a light from within struggled to break the barriers laid upon his soul by life and hard customs. Yet it was only a sunbaked range, dry and brown after a season of drought, and rimmed around with granite hills, strong and desolate.

From that distance the ranch-house was only a darkened patch upon the burned-out range, but it sent a welcome to him that was like beckoning hands, for it was home and he had never known a home before. A year ago he had not known the magic that may lie in a few rough boards and shingles, but now he knew. He was coming back after three days' absence and its faults made it only dearer to him.

He knew that the corral gate needed mending and would need it until he or Jack got around to the job. He knew that a window creaked and groaned in a high wind, but it was his window and he loved it. There were too many tin cans lying around the cook-house door, but now and then a tin can was needed and they had fallen into the habit of leaving them where they would be handy. Fault-finders might find plenty to complain of around his shack, but there were few of that ilk in the neighborhood and most of them had tin cans and loose shingles of their own. As for Billie Stranger, he loved the ranch as a man loves an old coat with a rip or two and a missing button—fitting his shoulders a little better than when it was new, its faults familiar and dear, like the imperfections in his own character.

He remembered the place as it had been when he took it over eight months before. Gradually, with earnest effort and Jack Baker's help, he was building up the ranch until it would compare favorably with the Circle O one of these days, but it was hard and grilling work, short-handed and with

little money to go on with. The house would have to wait. It was good enough for two men who only slept and ate there; some day they would have a better one.

A half-hour since he had turned the bunch of white faces over to Jack, who assumed the trust with solemnity. The white faces cost good money and, at that, they were only partially paid for. They represented uplift in the business of breeding cattle and their new owners, comparative strangers in that country, realized the importance of the initial step taken in stocking their range. They were shipped two-year-olds and their reception had been as momentous as the examination of a bride's trousseau.

During the return ride from Cat Fork Billie's mind had been gravely occupied with mental calculations that were the aftermath of his three days' absence. He had gone to town planning to spend just so much money and the amount had been nearly doubled. There was a sort of sickening familiarity about this procedure that made him long to cast such futile reckoning aside, but he sternly whipped his thoughts to their duty. Such miscalculation had often happened in the days when he was happy and free and could renounce addition until next pay-day, but it was different now and remorse had its innings in the tenderness with which he thought of home.

It would be a sort of relief to go around nailing on loose boards after the fool was he had bragged to Cat Fork of his fine ranch, his bunch of white faces and what he was going to do—bragged, with every cent he owned in the world wadded in his vest pocket. Winter was coming on and conscience upbraided him for every cent he had spent; the new stock would have to be fed and the price of alfalfa was already staggering upward. Then the optimistic side of his nature reminded him that the grass was holding out in the sheltered coulees and there was no hint of winter yet.

At the top of the rise Widow Green stopped of her own accord. As her rider slacked rein the ill-tempered mare elongated her flea-bitten neck and curled her mobile lip as though she, too, were contemplating

the valley below. For a moment her narrowed eyes held an almost uncanny wisdom; it was as though she possessed some secret knowledge, sneered at it and waited with diabolical patience for its existence to develop.

But Billie Stranger had no suspicion that Fate was stacking the cards for him while he dreamed about his distant home. He was thinking about what he would cook for supper—something that would keep hot for Jack, who would be following in a little while. It was late afternoon; there would be a lot to do before night; he would have to be moving along. The two were alone for the time, partly to save money and partly because their cattle were so few that they could care for them without assistance, but the scarcity of hands left far more than two men's work.

His vagrant gaze wandered over the valley for a last look before he rode on. Besides his own ranch he could glimpse the outskirts of the Circle O lying almost in the foothills, and much nearer, the Desmond place, known facetiously as the Weed-Patch.

This was where old Barney Desmond and his daughter Molly lived and but for the the girl's sake there was not a rancher in the valley who would not have been glad to see the last of the small farmer who, beginning with good intentions, had let ambition die until now there was only the hideous ruin that follows where cultivation is allowed to return to outraged nature.

The place was only a quarter section, but in its desolation it laid like a blot upon the valley with tumbledown buildings and rotting, rusty wire and a general air of hopelessness that depressed even those whose feelings were kindly toward its inhabitants. But now, for a reason of his own, Billie smiled as he looked upon it.

He nudged Widow Green with his knee.

"Move along, ol' lady," he said to the mare, who was a conquered man-hater and resented all commands, "needn't be snarl-in' your ol' nose at me. Shake a leg now. We got to get home and get them beans on th' fire."

The trail was narrow at this point and just ahead a huge face of granite uprising

in the way caused a sharp detour. As she reached this spot the widow, advancing cautiously, swerved aside, annoyed. She hated surprises and was startled by the horse and rider who appeared suddenly from behind the great boulder.

"Hands up!"

Billie Stranger was startled, too, or pretended to be, for he dropped his reins and elevated his hands in simulated terror. His face and voice expressed the most abject submission.

"Oh, please, mister, don't shoot!" he begged.

The newcomer urged his horse forward until he was nose and nose with the gray mare. He held a battered but businesslike revolver in a slim, brown hand. There was no pretense in the way he handled it.

"What kind of candy you got in them saddle-bags?" he demanded unexpectedly.

Billie lowered his hands with a laugh that echoed a squeal from the widow as she bared her ugly teeth and snapped viciously at the roan bronco in her path.

"Well, I'll be doggoned. I'll bust my canteen if it ain't a gal! A darn, pretty little gal, 'bout sixteen, with red hair an' all dressed up in britches. Huh! Betcha I know your name. Betcha there ain't a rider on this range that don't call you Little Britches. Betcha you ain't got no other name."

"I betcha you better shell out what you got in them bags quicker 'n scat!"

"Yes, ma'am."

That ended the little byplay. He hunted in his pockets and found a box done up in pink paper and tied with a gilt string, a heavy, chunky box which the rider of the roan horse accepted shyly, forgetting the tomboy frolic of five minutes ago as though it had never been. She dropped her six-gun into its holster and fell to examining her prize with awed and childlike curiosity.

It was easy enough to mistake her for a boy. She was a little thing, not in height but in extreme slenderness. Her lithe body had all the hard gracefulness of a youth with the delicacy of a young girl's fragile bones. She had a head of glorious red hair, cut short and curling close to her neck, which heightened her resemblance to a boy

—hair that came straight from her Irish forebears; and she had brooding black velvet eyes that witnessed her mother's Spanish blood.

Her tilted chin and indeterminate nose matched her Irish hair, but her mouth contradicted everything. The lips, thin, sweet, ascetic, remained grave and unsmiling through her own little jest. Their firmness hinted that she might have been capable of carrying into earnest if she had not been instantly obeyed. Behind their perfect curve there lay a suggestion of tragedy as though Fate warned already that her happy moments would be few.

She wore a ragged shirt with rolled-up sleeves that showed her thin arms, whose muscles were delicate and taut as fiddle-strings, and she gained her name from the faded blue overalls, patched and shrunken, but worn bravely, tucked in the tops of a pair of marvelous new boots. No one had ever seen Molly Desmond wear anything but overalls, usually discarded, made-over ones that had belonged to her father, and the nickname given in derision years ago was indelibly associated with her now.

The boots were the only portion of her costume that had not seen hard service, but she seemed oddly desirous of hiding their glittering newness from Billie's eyes. He saw this and his teasing mood came back.

"Well, if she ain't held up some pore, lone cow-puncher an' took his show leather right off'n him. Left him to hoof it bare-foot through th' scrub. I didn't think it of you, Britches. I didn't know you had it in you."

His quizzical eyes were on her stirrups and she whirled her horse this way and that, trying to hide the boots and not succeeding.

She answered unsmilingly, flashing a look of resentment from her somber eyes, but still showing an odd lack of pride in her possession.

"Tain't so. Poppy mail-ordered 'em. You got no right tuh say I stole somebody's boots."

Her temper and curious lack of humor was so well known that it had become a general habit to tease her. She never seemed to understand the gentle art of

"kidding," one of the most cherished forms of amusement among the cow-punchers who were her friends, and it was considered legitimate sport to "torment" Little Britches until she fell into one of her rages, which ended, as a rule, in a display of picturesque language shocking to hear upon her girlish lips.

Billie Stranger loved to touch tinder to this fury of hers, but she never swore at him. She was more likely to ride furiously away, avoiding him for days and yielding to his overtures of friendship only when her proud isolation became unendurable.

But he, looking upon her as a child, saw no warning in this attitude of hers. Sometimes he was remorseful when he knew that he had hurt her, but he always forgot at the next encounter. If he thought about it at all, it was to the effect that she needed the discipline this treatment afforded. Little Britches was a spoiled kid and needed straightening out. He looked upon her more as a boy than girl, and when she sulked he felt the impatience of one masculine being at the advertised weakness of another.

But at sight of her obvious uneasiness he forgot for once to pursue the advantage that was his, though it was evident that she was ripe for resentment on the subject of the boots. The sight of such adornment on the unkempt child who rode the ranges among men and cattle, speaking their language only, aroused a queer train of reflection in his mind.

Everybody knew the girl's father; his poverty, his shiftlessness.

It was his habit to "borrow" even such provisions as the two needed from the neighboring ranches, and no one was foolish enough to expect him to repay such loans. There had never been a crop upon the Weed-Patch—some of the land, the poorest in the valley, had been turned and that was all.

How then could Little Britches wear grand boots that shone with newness and were effulgent with the aroma of finely dressed leather, such as is seen only at rodeos and in the possession of plutocrats from the East? As Billie looked, his teasing

smile passed and his mouth became cold and stern as her own.

They were handsome boots and would have been noticed anywhere; soft, brown, Russian leather with glistening, polished heels and finished with insets of patent leather and elaborate stitching in colored silk thread. Contrasted with ninety-eight-cent overalls they were opulent, and Billie, whistling softly to himself as he finished taking an inventory of their points, looked away.

And while his expression changed, so did hers. Her eyes read his face, searched and analyzed the unspoken question behind his lips. The silence, so rare between them was charged with subtleties strange to their simple intercourse. She was first to break it.

"Poppy's got a right to spend his money the way he wants," she cried in a choked voice. "It ain't your business. You got enough to 'tend to of your own."

"I reckon you're right about that," he agreed. "But I'm just so constituted that when I see somebody tanglin' their wires I got to interfere. An' you're tanglin' yours, Britches. You ain't tellin' me straight about them boots. Old Barney never give up thirty-five bones for shoe-leather since I went over to th' Forks."

He knew this because he had been waylaid as he passed the Weed-Patch the morning he started after his cattle, and his last sack of Durham had been left in Barney's hands; in his pockets at this moment was a further supply, paid for with his own money and dedicated to the same user. The girl's face turned a slow scarlet as she realized his incredulity.

"You think I'm lyin' to you?"

"I know it, Britches. But I know you got some good reason for it if you are. It's curious about me. I always think about you like you was my own folks—maybe my sister's little kid. Kids always int'rested me, 'specially when they think they'd got to lie about somethin'—I always want 'em to understand that there's nothin' in this world worth lyin' about. It makes too much trouble. When you feel like you want to tell me about it, just remember I like kids, won't you, Britches?"

"An' you remember you ain't no folks of mine. You got no right—"

"I haven't asked you any questions yet," he reminded her dryly. "Seems like you're hatchin' up a terrible cyclone about nothin'. It ain't any harm to look at your new boots that I can see, but you seem mighty anxious to keep 'em out of sight. Plumb ungrateful, I call it."

He got his answer, but not the one he expected. The roan bronco wheeled suddenly, bumping against Widow Green and sending her rearing. There was a volley of flying gravel and the soft thud of something falling. The pink box landed on the trail ten feet away and the girl and her horse vanished around the boulder which had screened their arrival. She sent no angry word back to him, just rode away as she had done a dozen times before.

When she was gone he quieted his horse and swung himself from the saddle. He found the discarded candy-box, opened it, and begun to slowly eat a piece as the horse wound her way down the steep trail.

He was not angry at Little Britches because she had lied to him; he was merely annoyed and a little disgusted by her display of temper. But he was inclined to be philosophical about it. He had no doubt but that the boots could be explained satisfactorily; it was merely a phase of Little Britches to be noncommittal and mysterious on all subjects. Some queer, mistaken sense of pride was at the bottom of the lie and before long it would come to light.

Meantime, he liked candy as all cow-punchers do, and though the contents of the box was somewhat jammed together, the result was the same and he resolved to save some of it for Jack. They would play twenty-one that night with candy on the corners. They would have a big fire when the chill came on and a big pot of beans and bacon and flapjacks.

"By ginger!" said Billie to himself as he rode along. "What does a man want to fool with wimmen for? Always flyin' up at everything. Gettin' mad and raisin' hell. Mad if you do an' mad if you don't! That's the female sex in a nutshell. Give me peace. Peace is what I declare for."

The ranch came in view around a bend

in the trail. It was much nearer now. There was smoke coming from the chimney. He could make out the figure of some one standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER II.

PILGRIMS FROM AFAR.

EVEN the Widow Green seemed to sense a changed and unusual condition at the ranch-house, for she showed a distinct unwillingness to approach the corral gate which stretched invitingly though disastrously open. Not a horse remained within its dusty confines though Billie had every right to expect a remount for next day. His first thought was to blame Jack Baker for turning the horses out and then his heart misgave him. How could Jack be at the ranch when he was in charge of the new cattle a dozen miles away?

His gaze followed the smoke, delicately curling to the clear evening sky. After all, it could mean nothing but that some traveler had stopped for the night and without waiting for the owner to return had made his own preparations for supper. This was not uncommon enough to excite more than a passing thought. It meant only that the beans would be started cooking and that the game of twenty-one might be changed into a mild but exhilarating poker session.

His hand was on the cinch of the saddle when the door of the house opened and a figure, the same he had glimpsed from the trail, came out.

"Lord!" whispered Billie, speaking to the widow as was his custom. "What's that!" He stood looking at the strange figure, stranger still, coming from the unpainted door that was never locked and hunting for words to express his amazement, but finding none. "Whoa!" Widow! It ain't nothin'. Hold your dern feet still."

The man in the door wore an expression of trained expectancy, and Billie stood beside his dancing horse also expectant that the next second would find him waking from some sort of nightmare of which this person who seemed to be receiving him in his own house was the central figure. Such a dream

was enough to deprive any cow-puncher, however loquacious, of intelligent speech.

The stranger was an elderly man, possibly much older than he looked, for his careful grooming gave him a spruce look associated with youth. His face was smooth-shaven though set with a thousand lines and absolutely blank of expression. His arms hung rigidly at his sides; his back, old as it was, looked immovable.

His clothes were the queerest feature of his whole appearance, strange clothes to be seen at the Three Nines. A high, white collar and narrow tie enclosed his neck, and every button on his coat fitted neatly into its neat buttonhole. On Fifth Avenue his appearance at a door would have created no comment except possibly envy, but in Wyoming no man wears livery by day or night except behind bars, and Billie's amazement was not unnatural.

But, after all, it was his house. If a lunatic had possession of it there were still the duties of hospitality. Collecting his shaken nerves, he threw the widow's reins over a post with an air meant to be nonchalant and strolled toward the house, where the immovable figure awaited him. He thought it best to postpone unsaddling until he understood the situation better; the old man looked harmless enough, but you never can tell. As he remained silent, Billie opened negotiations with a noncommittal "Howdy?"

A faint break appeared in the other's countenance. For a moment Billie thought a smile was coming and then he saw he was mistaken. The stranger was only about to speak. With his faded eyes fixed on a spot two inches above Billie's head he mumbled in a thick, rich English voice:

"What nyme shall I say, sir?"

While Billie was in France his regiment had not been thrown with the Tommies so that he was unfamiliar with Cockney. In some confusion he grasped at a word that seemed familiar.

"Th' place is called Three Nines," he explained hopefully. "I changed it accordin' to a poker hand I held once."

But he was wrong. The other, attaching no importance to this explanation merely extended a limp hand which Billie, add-

ing to his blunders, accepted with a hearty shake.

"Hif you 'aven't a card, the nyme 'll answer," the automaton persisted when he had recovered his outraged fingers.

At last Billie understood. He was annoyed at his own mistake and answered shortly.

"I'm Billie Stranger if you want to know, an' bein' a sort of curious cuss I'd like to know just who you are yourself, and what this 'welcome home' stuff is bein' pulled on me for."

The house was not much of a habitation, a roughly boarded two-room shack with a lean-to for cooking—the plain dwelling of two plain cow-punchers caring more for their "chow" than for frills with their blankets. It had seemed good enough—Billie had thought tenderly of it, hungry and tired as he was—but when the person in the door wheeled on his heels, presenting an unobstructed view of the interior of the main room, Billie Stranger saw at once how miserably inadequate it was; how poverty-stricken and shame-faced its bare boards and deal table; how niggardly its mean accommodations.

He remembered how the stove careened on an ill-balanced leg. He and Jack had argued for weeks over the leg of that stove—which one should straighten it. Its existence stood out now like a prison sentence on a man's record. Two or three hours of tinkering would have fixed all these irregularities and now it was too late. After the first gasp Billie choked back a groan as his eyes took in the room and its contents.

A girl who had been sitting by the table arose and returned his astonished stare with an untranslatable look of her own, and if the voiceless figure in the door had been amazed, she was doubly so.

She was about twenty, tall and slender, with hands that looked like soft white cotton and the neck of her dress showed a little three-cornered bit that matched them. Her face was white, too, except for the soft pink of her cheeks and the red of her lips. Her eyes were gray, clear and deep; eyes it would be hard to look into and lie to successfully and her hair was black; smooth and soft, brushed away from her face and

folded into a shining knot that had no loose ends or straying wisps like other women's hair; the satin sheen of it was like a horse's flank just when the rough winter coat has worn away. She had on the sort of dress that a man always likes, which makes him feel noble and respectful and aching to protect somebody from something—soft, dark gray with little thin white collar and cuffs.

That was the vision Billie Stranger saw standing in the main room of his house surrounded by the rough, ordinary, even shameful furnishings that served Jack Baker and himself for living purposes. It was the presence of this strange girl that robbed the ranch of every claim it ever had to comfort and changed everything to mean barrenness—to makeshift poverty that somehow hit a man between the eyes and staggered him. The words that had been on Billie's lips were never spoken and he stood silently while the girl returned his abashed look with gentle dignity that had the power of placing her upon some unseen seat of judgment.

It was fully a minute before the silence was broken and while it lasted the person in the door retained his immovable position, heels drawn together and eyes fixed upon space. In spite of his dreamlike fascination for the beautiful girl Billie's eyes were magically drawn to this strange figure. Why did he stand so? What did he see?

The girl spoke first and the sound of her low voice meant paralyzing confusion to her hearer. Her singular words left him stammering and with the red crawling up behind his ears.

"I am so glad you passed this way. We have been waiting all day for some one to come. Perhaps—if you would be so kind, you might tell me something. My uncle, the owner of this ranch, was not expecting me, evidently—"

"Yes, má'am." Billie admitted in a voice quite unlike his own.

She came a step nearer and her beautiful eyes betrayed a hint of some restless feeling—anxiety, uneasiness.

"Before I trouble you further," the gentle voice continued, "may I ask if you are acquainted with my uncle, Mr. Norman

Hoyt? Unless you know him it will be useless to detain you."

It was necessary for her hearer to moisten his lips before he could frame the sparse words of his reply. He admitted a slight acquaintance with the person mentioned—but what did she mean by "not detaining him?"

"This is my uncle's home," she said with a faint flush growing on her cheeks, "I am quite sure of it—there can be no mistake. The man who drove us from the town they call Prosperity seemed to know the place quite well." She spoke half to herself, as though trying to combat a doubt that persisted in her own mind. "I wrote him that I was coming. I telegraphed and I cannot understand why he is not here to meet me—that and other things." She glanced at the mean walls of the shack, including it in her mystification; then her eyes turned rememberingly to Billie. "Do you know my uncle? You must, if you live near here."

"I know a heap of folks," said Billie Stranger, getting a grip on himself at last, "I'm acquainted with Hoyt, if that's what you mean, but as for knowin' him, I couldn't exactly say that."

Relief flashed over her face.

"My name is Geraldine Hoyt. I have come a long way—from England. You can understand what a disappointment it is not to find him after—after everything. I had planned it all so differently. I brought two of the old family servants with me, and—and I am quite at a loss to know what to do with them. There doesn't seem to be any place for servants here. Perhaps my uncle might make different arrangements. I am so anxious to see him. How can I let him know about us?"

A great many things passed through Billie Stranger's mind as he listened to this speech. His business in life was a leisurely one; he had not been trained to rapid calculations, but he made them now. His brain seemed to turn like a pinwheel. He remembered in a second all he had ever heard or knew of Norman Hoyt, the Englishman who had owned the Three Nines and lost it nearly a year ago in a poker game that was still the talk of Cat Fork.

He was a gambler and a waster, and the ranch had been staked as carelessly as a handful of chips in a spirit of sheer wantonness. Billie Stranger held the three that won it and the roll he put up against the gambler's bluff had been every cent he owned in the world, so he held himself no better than Norman Hoyt, though luckier. But this was no story to tell the pure-faced English girl.

He knew that Hoyt had gone away; somebody claimed to have seen him in Arizona months ago. Where he was now no one could say. From the way the girl spoke it was certain she had no suspicion that the property had passed into other hands.

It would have been ridiculously easy for a hard, businesslike person to simply say: "These are my diggings," and explain briefly that Hoyt had long since departed and letters and telegrams were doubtless lying unclaimed in some post-office miles away. The strangers would then take the hint and remove themselves from a spot where their presence was creating demoralization.

Easy enough for some people, but impossible for Billie Stranger who, pausing to weigh the matter, was lost. How could he enter upon this long and embarrassing explanation standing there with the blood pounding in his ears, under the calm blue eyes that seemed to be looking at him from a great distance? He temporized cravenly. There was plenty of time; Jack Baker could tell it better than he could and maybe make her understand the delicate nuances of the famous draw of three which, coming from himself, might seem more Cat Fork bragging. Women, even blue-eyed ones, had small effect on Jack. He managed to say:

"We'll get word to him somehow."

All this time they had faced each other across the narrow threshold, but now Miss Hoyt said something in a low tone to the monitor of the door who, wheeling again on his heels, presented a flat, high-shouldered back adorned with two round silver buttons at the waist-line, walked to the back of the room, and disappeared into the lean-to. In spite of his bewilderment Billie's curiosity stirred and he could not forbear a question.

"What is he—a policeman?" he whispered.

She did not smile; on the contrary her lovely face assumed an expression of faint disapproval. Her manner seemed to say that she had been annoyed on this subject before—unreasonably.

"A policeman! Certainly not. He is Jarrow—our butler," she said with a touch of asperity.

"Your—butler—excuse me, miss, did you bring him through Prosperity?"

Miss Hoyt's annoyance increased. "I did, naturally, since I traveled that way. But what is there so odd about a butler? Jarrow has been with our family a great many years—a sort of institution, you know. When there was no other way—when I decided to come out, I asked him and Mrs. Moffatt if they wished to accompany me, and they were glad to leave England—it is not the same. Of course I knew it would be primitive here, but it—it—is better than going to strangers."

"Yes'm." Billie agreed without knowing to what he committed himself.

Suddenly her manner softened a little; she became almost cordial with a hint of shyness somewhere about her.

"Won't you come in?" she invited, moving further into the room with a simple gesture that invited him to follow. "It seems foolish to leave you standing there just because there is no one to introduce us." And he obeyed her meekly, even to accepting the chair she indicated. But when he was seated she remembered something. "Perhaps I shouldn't stop you. You were on your way—" she began anxiously.

"No, no, I was just ridin'. You see, miss, I live here."

The words blurted out before he could stop them. He hadn't meant to tell her in just that way; he hadn't meant to tell her at all, and he kept his eyes on the toes of his boots dreading to look up and see her face. But she startled him with a little cry of relief.

"Oh, why didn't you say so at first? You belong to the place? If you are employed by my uncle then I may speak plainly to you!"

This was miles away from what he had intended to imply, but taken by surprise he was obliged to bolster up his statement.

"Yes, I live here," he muttered.

"You drive the cattle about, don't you?" the English girl continued, rather wistfully. "That must be great fun. I've promised myself to try it some day, if uncle has a spare mount." She paused, remembering something that changed her smile to sadness. "Nobody's had much fun these years, have they? But I feel sure the ones who've—passed on wouldn't want us to be always sad, would they? My own people, father and George and Hubert loved horses, of course—"

Billie had made a discovery. There was a picture of Mary Pickford pinned on the wall—discovered in an old magazine and carefully preserved. It had smiled tenderly and helpfully on Billie and Jack and their rude housekeeping—some way, that pictured face had always seemed to take hold and understand everything. By gazing steadfastly into its smiling eyes he was able to keep his bearings and get hold of the mystery just a little.

She had said she was from England—the butler and the talk about "cattle driving" proved that, and she spoke as though her father and brothers were dead. The war would account for that. Suppose, being left alone in the world she had come out to live with Norman Hoyt? And as if she read his mind, her next words proved this theory true.

"My brothers were killed in France, and my father—it was too much for him, you see. He—he—went when things looked rather dark for us—before America came in. It was when the coast attacks were made. He loved England very much and—and—he was old." Her brave voice faltered a little, but she went on steadily after a moment: "I hope you don't mind listening to this. Somehow, it seems necessary to explain, though I can't imagine why. It must be because everything is so different in America. When I left home, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should come to my uncle here—but now—"

She stopped. It was plain that a doubt had entered her mind, an instinct born of

woman's intuition which warned her of an underlying strangeness in her reception.

Billie got up. Not even Mary Pickford's smile could hold him quiet for a longer time. He must get out into the air where he could think and where he could look this thing in the face and conquer it. His predominant feeling was gladness that he had not spoken—for once his diffidence with women had been a saving grace.

Geraldine Hoyt stood up. There was a quick transition in her manner that once more placed an unbridgable distance between them.

"If you are my uncle's agent you must make every effort to get word to him at once that I am here," she said crisply. "In the mean time I must wait with what patience I have." By this time Billie was outside where the widow's impatient whinny greeted him. As Miss Hoyt stood in the doorway her eyes fell on the open corral gate. When she spoke again her voice took on an edge, perceptible through its softness.

"Where *are* my uncle's horses? Surely he must have a few with so much land!"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Billie ruefully, "I got to be goin' now. Some of them broncos has got to be rounded up before dark, that's certain. I'd sure like to know how that gate got opened."

Her eyes flashed indignantly. "I can tell you that. There were some poor little moor ponies shut up in there, actually starving. I had Jarrow open the gate and turn every one free," at his stupefied look she went on severely: "They were ungroomed and hungry in that bare, dusty paddock, and if you are about to put that animal in the same place I must protest in my uncle's name. I love horses and I cannot see them ill-used."

There was a fair supply of precious winter hay in racks beyond the corral and to this shelter Billie lead Widow Green, surprised beyond measure at her unexpected good fortune. Safely hidden from espionage he released the resentment of his soul in a vicious slap at the gray mare. She had practically accused him of ill-treating horses—that hurt.

"Well, you jus' wait until she sees Jack an' ol' Tomato Can," he muttered, and the

picture he saw before his mind's eye was so amusing that it earned a rueful laugh.

She was standing near the corral when he walked past on his way to the unused bunk-house—which would be idle no longer. It was strange to see her there in her gray dress with her snow-white hands and the setting sun, gold colored, behind her. She came toward him timidly. "Did I do wrong to turn the ponies free?" she asked.

He told her no, and went on his way. He felt differently out of doors. He was no longer tongue-tied and blushing. If he hadn't been so sorry for her he could have stopped then and there and told her flat, that no man worthy of the name ever abused a horse. But some way it didn't seem like the right time to speak up.

CHAPTER III.

THEY DINE AT THREE NINES.

JACK BAKER heard the story in secrecy behind the hay-racks, where his deplorable cayuse known as Tomato Can from his battered outline and splotched red-and-white coat, had been cached in company with Widow Green. It was important to keep these two horses until the others could be rounded up and each was securely hobbled. No greater calamity could befall than to find themselves afoot when morning came and in the light of preceding events they judged the corral unsafe.

"Gosh!" mused Jack when the story had been well threshed over. "If she ketches sight of them hobbles she's liable to accuse us of ham-stringin' them broncos. Me, I'm goin' tuh cut loose fer th' Forks come daylight."

He spoke in a strained whisper, as though fearing to awaken some light and dangerous sleeper. He had heard Billie through with only an occasional comment, but his friend and employer knew that he was duly impressed by the calamity fallen upon their establishment. Billie himself was already better from masculine support and the two were trying to settle upon some way out of the affair with honor for all. Billie's business was Jack's business and the threat about Cat Fork meant nothing—just talk.

"If you'll step over about a foot," said Billie, "you can see th' man—th' butler, she called him. He's standin' in th' back door, sorta lonesome, lookin' over to Prosperity. Maybe th' Three Nines ain't good enough fer him; maybe he rather be in Prosperity. Look, he's got on th' purple coat with shiny buttons. What, I ask you, would be the result if th' bunch at Cat Fork laid eyes on them buttons?"

Jack moved eagerly to where he could view the unconscious Jarrow, ruminating over his chew of comforting plug. Jack had borne the thing very well, all told, but then he was older than Billie; he liked to read detective stories and usually herded alone. He spoke soothingly, recognizing the fact that his friend had been tried.

"Don' get sarcastic, now," he warned. "To my mind that old party ain't thinkin' about Prosperity at all. He looks plumb worried. Who's that other one?"

A woman joined Jarrow in the lean-to door, so miserably inadequate to frame such figures—a majestic, dignified old lady in a black silk 'dress and a little white apron. She wore a tiny lace cap with black ribbons on her snow-white hair, which was primly parted and drawn into a broad braid at the back of her head. The two spoke earnestly together in voices so low that no word reached the listeners behind the hay-racks, but it was plain from their faces that they were troubled about something.

The sun was almost down. Over the valley and over the mountains, those that were near and those that were far away, a haze had crept, dulling the crude outlines of day, painting soft shadows where sunlight had been hard and brilliant; lending to homely objects the gentleness and peace of slow-coming night.

The man and woman in the lean-to door, strange to this environment as they were natural to their own, looked over the miles and miles of valley and mountain to the direction that meant home to them. Their faces were sad and wistful, even longing, though their lips were silent. Geraldine Hoyt came and stood between them and her face was the same. She seemed to have grown younger in the last hour, more dependent and childlike. There was some-

thing forlorn in the three figures silhouetted against the mean background of the unpainted shack.

"Thunder!" said Jack Baker. "I betcha them folks couldn't cook a flapjack to save their souls."

Miss Hoyt hesitated when the two cowboys made their offer to initiate the strangers into ranch housekeeping. The sadness of her face vanished at the first word to be replaced by her customary reserve.

"It is kind of you," she said. "Of course neither Jarrow or Mrs. Moffat know anything about such matters. I supposed that there would be servants here—"

The pride in her persisted; she stubbornly refused to take cognizance of the two-room shack and the lean-to where a tall man could barely stand upright; or the stove with the broken leg. She might have been in possession of a mansion for all the notice she gave to these things. But when she glanced at the dejected faces of the two family retainers she was forced to yield, though plainly against her will.

"There are many things we do not understand," she said simply, "I should be glad of your help."

"Hi hunderstand a sensible range," Jarrow said gloomily, "but this harrangement his beyond me."

Jack Baker did most of the cooking that first night. Though awed in the beginning, he gradually lost that feeling and actually seemed to enjoy his transitory importance. He missed a quality in the whole adventure that was painfully plain to Billie. Jack knew nothing about caste or social divergencies, and if he had his aplomb would have remained unshaken.

He recognized the immense difference between the strangers and himself, but innocently construed the advantage to his own side of the ledger. To his idea it would be difficult to imagine anything more hopelessly ignorant than Mrs. Moffat in the simple matter of making sour-dough biscuit, or the amusing blunder of Jarrow, who asked Billie Stranger in a hoarse whisper: "Will you show me where the sherry is kept?"

Even Billie smiled wryly at that as he explained that wine and Wyoming had parted company long ago.

Once when the two cowboys were near each other, Jack whispered:

"She's a settin' outside on the bench a-waitin' fer us mean varlets to lay down an' let her walk on us when she comes in to eat."

"Shut up!" Billie came back sharply, for just outside the open door he caught sight of the edge of a gray dress. She was walking up and down with her blue eyes fixed on the far-off mountains, dark-blue with the coming night, and her little hands clasped listlessly before her.

But in spite of the dense ignorance of his pupils, Jack took an obvious pride in his cookery and in explaining everything to Mrs. Moffat and Jarrow with all the methodical care of a teacher elucidating the a, b, c's. He was enjoying himself and they accepted their lessons gravely.

"You see, folks," he said kindly. "It ain't always possible to get the right sort of Chink on a ranch like the Three Nines. Leastwise, some folks is awful partic'lar an' maybe Mr. Hoyt is one of them. That's why he didn't have somebody here to cook instead of havin' to fall back on two poor cow-punchers. He's one of them kind that don't see no mortal use in a pair or two. He's got tuh have a full house or nothin'."

Billie hissed "Shut up!" for the second time in a tone that meant obedience. He was less embarrassed, but more troubled as the minutes went by and he realized to what his hesitancy in speaking out had committed him. Jack was joking, but the affair was beginning to look like real earnest to Billie. She would have to be told some time and what would happen then?

As she passed the door once more he could see the smooth, graceful outline of her head, and some instinct warned him that she heard every word of Jack's mendacious speech, though there was no sign of listening in her unmoved poise. He wanted to kick Jack because it seemed that he was making fun of their broken pride—these guests from across the sea.

The room, which was not large, was crowded with five people, several trunks, and the usual allotment of furniture. Jarrow attended to the setting of the table and did it well. Out of the simple, crude

means at hand, he actually achieved a dinner-table for one, and when the meal was ready Miss Hoyt took her place and the old butler stood behind her chair as precisely as he would have done in her father's house. When necessity forced him to the indignity of visiting the lean-to where Mrs. Moffatt, with a pained face, had taken Jack's place, he performed the duty with a poise that was too admirable to be lost on an ignorant world.

Released from their self-imposed task the two cowboys wandered down to the empty corral and climbed on the fence, where the cool wind that always sprung up with the evening, fanned their faces. The topic which filled their minds was of such magnitude that there seemed no way to approach it. It was Jack who made a beginning at last.

"She never said a word about our eatin' with her."

Billie frowned. "Of course not. You did th' cookin'. That sort of folks don't eat with their cooks."

"An' that tall galoot," mused Jack. "Him standin' there behind her chair handin' her things when he otta be out here helpin' with th' chores. I s'pose she wouldn't eat with him, neither." When he received no answer he rambled on: "It's funny how a change of location kinda knocks hell out of what folks think is the right way of doin' things. Now, if that gal, Lady Geraldine, an' that galoot, ol' Tin Buttons, was on Fif' Avenoo it 'd seem all right fer her an' him to act like they ain't never spoken together, but out here in Wyoming it looks like plain, dern foolishness. She's a pretty girl, I'll admit, but what's she ever done to make her better than th' ol' party—her with th' white apron?"

Mrs. Moffatt's dignity and soft, white hair had touched Jack in a vulnerable spot, for in his simple code, age and childhood were the sole requisites that gave one human being the right to profit by another's discomfort. But his mind was not one to waste effort over abstract questions and his thoughts quickly veered to the practical side.

"Say, Billie, what we goin' tuh do about sleepin' an' feedin' ourselves? I b'en ridin'

since sun-up an' we got tuh get out after that stock first thing. I ain't goin' back in there after nuthin'."

"I've thought of that," Billie answered seriously. "We'll have to rig up th' bunk-house an' Tin Buttons 'll have tur roost out there, too. There ain't room in th' house fer him an' th' wimmen folks. As fer grub, I'll rustle some, I ain't afraid."

After a protracted silence Jack said: "'Tain't none of my business, but I'd like tuh know just how you figger on gettin' outa this. I ain't kickin', understand, but you an' me are only human. We can't undertake to keep up no establishment *with* butler an' cookin' done pronto, an' give them white faces the kind of nussin' they expect an' otta have. I'd like best in th' world tuh help them folks live up to what they been used to, but me, I'm only an' onery cow-puncher with most of my brains in my knees, havin' been showed early how to stick on a buckin' hoss, an' after I been ridin' herd most all day, I can't keep awake at night studyin' what tuh serve Lady Geraldine fer her breakfast. I'd just like tuh suggest tuh you that th' longer a thing grows th' deeper its root gets."

Billie acknowledged the wisdom of this.

"I know it," he said gravely. "I know I'm a dern fool. I otta told her right off. But I leave it to you, Jack, how could I, taken by surprise thataway? An' then when she begun to talk I couldn't help standin' there just dumb. She told me about her folks bein' killed—brothers, an' her ol' man kickin' out because he thought them sauerkrauts was fixin' to climb all over his range. I couldn't say nothin', I'll swear I couldn't. She didn't complain, but she must have been hard put to come here to live."

"How you goin' tuh get word to Hoyt?" asked Jack slowly, and a comprehensive look passed between the two.

"I got to think it over," Billie replied, getting down from the fence. "Meantime, I can't see no harm in these folks stoppin' over a spell." He paused, running a quirt through his lean fingers. "About this ranch, now. You know I won it fair an' square in that game over to the Forks. I held threes an' he was tryin' to bluff me. He didn't think I'd call—"

"That's so," Jack agreed, looking into the past.

"What I mean," Billie explained, "is that three nines is an awful little draw to win a ranch on. If it 'd been fours or a straight flush, I'd feel all right about it, but three nines—it don't seem right fair to them folks in there."

"Yas," said Jack, watching the house. His friend's logic was entirely plain to him and he did not attempt to argue. It was safer and quieter to change the subject. "I wonder if he's done handin' her things. I wish we had a can of peaches. It did seem sorta plain chuck to offer a lady."

Then Billie Stranger remembered something. He went over to his saddle and took an oblong pink box from one of the pockets. When he turned it over in his hand he was grinning—a secretive, mystifying grin, full of reminiscences.

"I guess we won't play any to-night," he said, taking a step toward the house. "By the time we eat it 'll be time to turn in."

He entered the room where Miss Hoyt was having her dinner, running the gantlet of Jarro, who stared at him coldly. She was still sitting at the table looking out at the fast-deepening twilight. The sour-dough biscuits were cold, the bacon on her plate was untouched. It must have been that the shadows had crept into her eyes, for they were different, cloudy, and soft. She looked up when Billie appeared in the door and the corners of her mouth lifted. It was not a smile, but an effort in the direction of one.

Mary Pickford helped out again. With his eyes fixed on her encouraging pictured smile, Billie plunged.

"I thought maybe you wasn't used to the rough sort of livin' out here," he said gruffly, and put the open box of crushed chocolates before her, "so I brought these. There's plenty over in Cat Fork. They ship a lot in every week. They're sorta mashed on top, but underneath they're all right."

With two slim white fingers she dipped into the sticky mass and broke off a brown-and-white bit.

"I'm very fond of sweets," she replied with a little ripple in her voice as though

she were about to cry, or laugh. "But you must not give them all to me." She studied his averted eyes, still clinging desperately to Mary's, and went on, picking her words slowly and carefully, as though his intelligence were something far apart from her own, and for his benefit the conversation must be plain and simple. She got up from the table with a movement of faint disdain, purely instinctive, and went to the door where he stood.

"I have been thinking," she said, "I'm going to say something that may sound rather queer, but I hope you'll understand. When I reached that town—Prosperity they call it—I begun to see that all the dreams and air castles I'd been building about my uncle's place in America were a bit impossible—just as all dreams are"—she paused, choosing her words—"but when I reached here I did not know what to think. It is inconceivable that any one should live in this way—one of my family. I almost doubted for a time that it *was* his house, but when you said so—"

"Yes, ma'am," said Billie in a thick voice.

"When I learned the truth," she went on, "it was very bad for a few minutes, but now I have thought it all over. I have seen that there must be a readjustment of my ideas—after all, it is not half so bad as some of the places where people lived while the war was on, or where people are living now and being happy and hopeful in spite of everything. I have no right to be despondent or to feel disappointed. I am beginning to see that my fancies were preposterous. I cannot bring England over and set it down in your Wyoming. No, I must learn to be Wyoming and myself; Jarro must learn, and Mrs. Moffatt, too, if we are to be happy and—forget." Suddenly she laughed, a ringing girl's laugh. "What idiots we must seem to you."

A sense of ease and comfort began to creep over Billie. It was like coming to and finding pay-day a week nearer than your calendar predicted, or finding a clear spring when your bronco's mouth is sore and dry. It gave him courage to tear his eyes from Mary's safe smile and answer boldly.

"No, ma'am, we didn't think that. We know how rough it is f'r a lady. But we was just wonderin' if you wouldn't rather go back to Cheyenne or Denver or some of them places where there's good hotels, an' wait until we round up your kin folks."

His anxiety prevented him from noting the swift change that fell upon her face at that. She moved away, signifying that the interview was over.

"I think not," she said coldly. "I shall remain here until my uncle returns. You must get word to him at once: I shall do very well, I am sure." By this time Billie was out of doors—his speech now seemed inhospitable and rude—as if he did not want her to stay. He was twenty feet away from the house when she called him back. She looked very young and small on the doorstep with the black night closing in around her.

"I just wanted to ask if you and your friend sleep near the house," she began in a faintly tremulous voice. "I was never nervous before, but it seems very—very—lonely here."

"Shucks!" he scoffed, reassuringly. "There's nothin' to bother. It's too far from the mountains for cats, and the coyotes don't come around here. We've potted too many. Nothin' 'll bother you, miss."

"But you don't understand," she cried with a break in her voice. "It's so *lonesome*."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAY OF A MAID.

JACK and Billie were away next morning before their surprising visitors gave a sign of their existence. The release of the horses was a small catastrophe that meant hours of precious time lost before they could be rounded up and the desired ones cut from the bunch. The horses on the Three Nines range were not saddle stock—most of them were unbroken outlaws, and the saddle wise ones were quick to revert to the savage state with freedom.

"If only they don't take up with ol' I B Dam," Jack grumbled, drawing in his cinch.

"This hyer hoss, Tomato Can, can run with any bronco that ever come against him and his work with the rope is common talk, but that sorrel devil ain't a real hoss. He's some sort of a witch—a witch's hoss, you'd say."

"I'll shoot him some day when he makes me mad," predicted Billie briefly. "That hoss wasn't meant to run loose an' devil folks the way he does."

They mounted and rode away, taking the lower trail that would bring them near the foothills, where they were reasonably certain of finding the horses.

By tacit consent they ignored the events which had finished the previous day. The business in hand was too important for waste of time and thought upon matters that had no present solution.

Jarrow shared their quarters in the bunkhouse and they had to admit a furtive admiration for the dignity which accepted the crude accommodations without a word of complaint, or a hint that everything was not of the best. Jarrow never spoke. He seemed to be dumb—whether from a sense of wrong put upon him or from shock at the revelation of what America could do to those who trusted her too far it was impossible to say. They offered him no conversation, but merely such hospitality as was in their power, and when they rode away in the morning he was still sleeping.

"We otta have another hand," Jack said after a while. "Them white faces now. They otta be looked after right along."

Billie frowned. It was hard to admit, even to Jack, that he was almost down to his last dollar. The ranch had been a sort of white elephant on his hands and there were moments, much as he loved it, when he felt the strain and chafed under it. He had won it fair enough according to the game of chance, but Norman Hoyt was a reckless fool and a desperate gambler and many times Billie had figured ruefully that he would have been better off out of the game and free to lead his old, untroubled life. But that was when the charm of home was lifted for a moment.

There was much land, but it was not of the best. Little was under fence and there were no improvements. The stake had in-

cluded everything, but this turned out to be a herd of half-wild horses and the dwindling remains of an injudiciously selected bunch of cattle worth little more than their hides. It was understood that Hoyt's people had stocked his range fairly well, but the gambler had given his cows small attention. He was a waster, nothing more, and certainly many things worse, and his lack of management would have ruined a better property than Three Nines, which was not its name in those days.

Billie Stranger, whose history was unknown beyond the two years he had spent across the sea, had arrived in Cat Fork one day and relieved Hoyt of his holdings by a miraculous display of card acumen, and had entered into his new kingdom with enthusiasm. He knew his business and he believed he could pull the rundown ranch from its ignominy, but his calculations were close to the skin. He had to buy his stock, partly on credit; he had to feed them, and that cost money. Which was why he and Jack did five men's work. Next year, if everything went well, it would be easier.

"It 'll be all right when we catch th' horses," he said.

"I don't want then white faces tuh ramble too near the foothills." The note of uneasiness persisted in Jack's voice. "Camberwell's men have taken to ridin' along th' lower trail—"

"Don't say it."

Their eyes met significantly as they had met last night when Norman Hoyt's name was mentioned between them. There were many things not to be spoken of even on the wide range where there was nothing but the sky and earth to hear. They both knew this and Jack turned the talk to other channels.

"Yesterday when I was ridin' home I met old Desmond's little gal. An', believe me, she was in some powerful mad spell. Somebody had stepped on her feelin's and mussed 'em up considerable. The kid was a-swearin' an' a-cussin' until I was ashamed to listen an' covered up my ears. Then she turned round and cussed me until I opened 'em up an' heard what she said. Seems like a pity tuh hear a gal cuss like that."

Billie agreed soberly.

"It does sound bad. Ol' Desmond otta do somethin' about it. But you know Little Britches ain't no easy maverick to rope. She takes tellin' worse than any female I ever saw. You saw me with that box of candy last night? Well, that's what I brought her from th' Forks. I had plenty to think about when I was over there, but I recollected an' brought Little Britches her choc'lates because I promised I would, an' what did she do?"

"Them was *her* choc'lates?"

"Yas. But what did she do? Up an' throwed 'em at me because I took notice of some boots she was wearin'. She didn't cuss me then, but I'll bet it was me she was cussin' when you met her. I made her mad just mentionin' the boots an' she rode off on that dude hoss of hers, kickin' gravel in my face worse'n ol' I B Dam."

Jack Baker deftly rolled and lighted a cigarette with one hand and it was half smoked before he rendered his opinion.

"You're a fool, Billie, a plumb fool! What d'ye know about wimmin? Excuse me for sayin' so, but your head otta be helt under a pump till you wake up. I admit you picked out some good stock, but you better be careful when you range among fillies. You done a dangerous thing an' I wouldn't be in yore shoes for nothin' you could name. Too much luck has made you reckless, but you gotta remember that females ain't like cards and my opinion is you got yourself balled up till there ain't no solid ground under your feet at all. You done put your neck in th' noose, an' whichever way you turn you're goin' tuh get it twisted. I'm sorry, Billie, plumb sorry for you. I gotta think what I can do to help out."

"Shucks!" said Billie, trying to speak easily. He was a little startled in spite of himself, but tried to conceal the fact. He believed that Jack was fooling, but still there might be something in what he said. He tried to speak with bravado. "What've I done, I'd like to know?"

"You've passed insult to two females, that's what you've done," his friend pronounced solemnly. "You may not know it; I expect you tuh deny it, but you've

shore done it. Look it straight in th' face. You brought a present for one female; you rile her by buttin' into somethin' that don't concern you, an' she han's your present back—"

"She throwed it at me," Billie interpolated, in self-defense.

"No matter if she did. No matter if she throwed it with a cuss word or two, the intention was th' same. Females is proud that way—always handin' things back when you make 'em mad, but expectin' you tuh come crawlin' after 'em, begging 'em to take th' despised offerin' back. Of course, she expected it; don't look at me like a yearlin' calf—any female would expect it. But did you do any crawlin'? Did you ask her pardon for speakin' personal about her wearin' apparel? Nix. I lay a month's wages you did not. Instead, you innercently picks up th' box, bein' prudent an' savin' by nature an' wishin' tuh save an' e-conomize, puts it in your pocket to take home, meanin' to eat it yourself. Insult No. 1 to first female."

He paused triumphantly, disregarding his companion's harassed look.

"Then this second party, Lady Geraldine, what did you do to her?" he went on. "I got tuh say, Billie, that your case looks bad from that quarter. How you'll explain passes me. When this party who looks peaked enough, scoffs at our good grub, you rushes in with your choc'lates that Little Britches heaved at you, an' offers 'em tuh her."

He twisted his gnarled features in what might have been a mendicant's expression and quoted in a high, wavering voice: "Here, lady, take these choc'lates. They ain't much, but they're yours. Eat 'em all. Don't save any. Little Britches won't ask for 'em again—oh, won't she?"

Their fruitless search had brought them to the outskirts of the Circle O, whose glistening wire stretched across the range hung to a methodical row of well-planted posts. Far ahead they saw a group of men and horses gathered near a section of the fence.

"Th' wire must be down," said Jack, forgetting frivolity. "If it is ol' Patten will be tearin' mad."

His prediction was correct, for when the two joined the Circle O men a little later,

they found a sulfurous condition and a mutilated section of wire with the marks of a cutter too plainly upon it to admit the possibility of accident.

"Yas, we lost a bunch of calves through here, all right," Patten told them with a grim face. "We'll put up th' wire an' then we'll start in lookin' for our stock. We'll find it, too."

Somebody had seen Billie's horses a few miles further on and he and Jack rode that way in silence. The wire-cutting had taken their minds from jesting and they were uneasily anxious to get back to their own territory. If there were rustlers in the valley, there was no way to tell where loss might come next. And both remembered that a large part of Three Nines did not possess even the inadequate protection of wire.

Not many words passed between them until they came in sight of the horses—not feeding contentedly as might have been expected at that hour, but circling around a large area, their speed increasing with every stride the madness that breeds a stampede settling upon their upthrown heads, their distended nostrils, their wild eyes.

At their head galloped the leader, a lithe creature with a brilliant, pale-red coat and mane and tail of the blackest. He gloried in the unrest that sent the others racing at his heels and it was he who delicately increased the speed, artfully leading to what would soon be wild rebellion. This stallion, spared because of his beauty, was one of the devils of the range—more dangerous because his mood could never be accounted for.

He had been ridden easily and by an indifferent rider, and he had broken the neck of one of the best busters at a rodeo. No man could say what his temper was, and for that reason he remained unconquered. Mingling with his herd was the half-broken bunch from the corral and the men's spirits sunk when they saw the mood of their quarry.

"I B Dam has got 'em," cried Jack.

"Spread, an' we'll catch what we can."

The red-and-white pinto deserved some of the praise lavished upon him by his owner for, in spite of its dejected appearance,

he could move, and Jack was on his way to a wide detour before the words left Billie's mouth. Billie took another direction, which brought him nearer the circling horses, and when he got in closer range he saw the cause of the trouble. A horse and rider were in the tail of the group and it was their presence which had disturbed and frightened the others. He was still some distance away, but he could see that the mounted horse was a roan with cream-colored markings, and the rider a small, familiar figure with tossing hair that made a little spot of color in the dark mass where it revolved.

"Little Britches," Billie muttered angrily. "What's she up to now?" He was soon to know. Suddenly the roan horse darted out of the group with an astonishing burst of speed that placed him at a sharp angle from the beautiful leader. The girl swung an arm above her head and a rope spun out. Its coil settled gracefully around the stallion's left hind foot and in a second he was floundering helplessly on the ground, spared mercifully from the hoofs of his tribe, who veered affrightedly aside.

When Billie reached the spot she had the saddle from the roan's back and the stallion neatly trussed against the time she would release him. She looked up sullenly, but did not cease her work at his approach.

Billie was mad clear through.

"What are you doin'?" he demanded without any softness in his voice. This was men's work and her interference had cost the better part of the morning. He forgot that Geraldine Hoyt had released the horses to begin with, though his anger was partly fear for the younger girl. He knew the temper of the horse on the ground and afterward, she was a woman.

"What you doin' to I B Dam?" he repeated sternly. "Come away from that horse an' I'll turn him loose."

"You'll not," she answered fiercely. "I roped him. I'm a goin' tuh ride him."

"Ride him?" Billie laughed, though he did not feel like laughter. "You're crazy, child. He'd eat you up! Here comes Jack. Behave yourself an' come away."

"You act like I was dirt," she cried in sudden passion. "You look at me like I

was a toad in th' dust—somethin' to grin at an' step on if it suited you. I *will* ride I B Dam. I'll show you. You can't laugh at me or step on me, either." She was trembling; the rope dropped from her hands. She raised her eyes and suddenly Billie Stranger saw a queer thing. In her thin, brown face, which was only half pretty, he saw a child become a woman. "I'm not a toad," she sobbed.

Billie, who had never read the book of woman, saw a light.

"Was that why you wanted to ride him?" he asked gently. "To make me think 'Gee, what a wonderful person Molly Carmencita Desmond is! When I saw you doing it?'"

"Yes," she breathed.

"You don't have to ride I B Dam to make me think that. You're the best little girl I know, Britches, an' if you was a little toad an' I saw you hoppin' in th' dust, I'd pick you up an' set you on some green grass, an' every day I'd come an' feed you lightnin'-bugs, I shore would. I'd spend my days catchin' 'em for you."

Jack Baker rode up in time to hear her reply. She did not see him; her thoughts were far too enrapt for that. She looked up at Billie shyly through her long lashes.

"I'd like to have my candy now," she said.

CHAPTER V.

CAT FORK.

BILLIE brought the horses home alone and Jack rode out after the cattle.

In the stern business of cutting out their corral stock there was no more talk with Little Britches and when it was over she took the trail to the Weed-Patch, riding proudly away on her roan bronco, Dude, without once looking back.

But Billie gave her little thought. He had been startled for a moment by the look of maturity in her child's face, but this was quickly forgotten in the stress of more important matters. He had to get the string of horses into the corral and make the young lady understand that they belonged there. He thought that on the whole it would be best to take the matter up with

Jarrow, who, being better acquainted with her, might be able to translate the situation to her enlightenment.

He was troubled, too, about the wire-cutting at the Circle O. Charley Patten was not the man to tamely submit to this piracy of the range and the rustlers, whoever they might be, were bold indeed to begin their operations in the valley by meddling with such a strong and formidable outfit as the Circle O boasted.

From time to time stock disappeared from the range as in all cattle-breeding countries, but this was to be expected and ranchmen as a rule attributed these losses in an easy fashion to natural causes. But the cut wire was a menace impossible to overlook or under estimate. Somewhere in the neighborhood there was a traitor and justice demanded inexorably that he must be discovered. So Billie was troubled, going over in his mind every possible suspect and gradually eliminating every one of the men who, in his short tenure, had become friends impregnable to doubt.

There was no sign of life about the ranch when he rode up, but while he was busy about the corral Mrs. Moffatt came out of the house and approached with gingerly steps as though expecting a pitfall at every yard. She had a piece of paper in her hand and he understood from her gesture that she wished to speak to him.

In the bewilderment of last night he had scarcely looked at her, but now he saw that her face was sweet and soft, covered with fine little lines and wrinkles that framed faded blue eyes. She looked up at him and smiled, but her eyes were timid and searched his with an unvoiced question.

"I'll have to ask you to get these things for us, Mr.—Mr.—Stranger," she said in a low voice, as though she feared being overheard. "You can see it is not very comfortable for Miss Geraldine, so I made a list of a few little articles. I understand you are caring for Mr. Norman Hoyt's property, so you must be the right person to ask."

He took the paper and glanced at the enumerated list which, in copper-plate handwriting, asked for things that had never been heard of in Cat Fork. He was non-

plused, but he made a strong effort and successfully concealed his embarrassment.

"I'll have to tell you, lady," he answered without the quiver of an eyelash, "that our town is some restricted. Ol' Doc Gates that keeps store hasn't much gumption about nice fixin's. I shouldn't be surprised, now, if he had to send clean to Cheyenne for some of these groceries, but such as he's got in stock I'll fetch over as soon as them broncos can make it there an' back."

She sighed with visible relief.

"You are very good. Miss Geraldine is acting very strangely. She forbade me to make any changes—she knows nothing of this list—but this morning she is so pale. She could eat nothing. I do not believe she slept. The isolation—loneliness—seemed to trouble her."

Billie gave a few rapid and guilty thoughts to Jack, expecting his assistance with the white faces and expecting in vain. Then he yielded. What else could he do? The delicate young lady who had dropped from the sky upon his door-step mutely asked for help through the medium of Mrs. Moffat and his heart told him that it was vastly more important to make her comfortable than to ride after stock which could easily take care of itself. Jack would understand everything when he explained and Jack was not unreasonable. He invented a plausible story as he coaxed two wild-eyed broncos into the traces of the buckboard and in the end completely persuaded himself of Jack's sympathy.

And when the broncos had ceased jerking the buckboard over the trail in a succession of wild plunges that threatened every bolt and wheel, and settled down at last to spasmodic, uneven travel, Billie found himself forgetting Jack and duty and thinking only of the girl who couldn't sleep or eat because she was lonely.

Some way the thing came near him and hurt unaccountably, though his place was so very small in her life. He loved the big, wide spaces and the somber hills, and he had never been lonely in their care. It was like hearing evil spoken of a dear friend. For him the whole land teemed with secret, friendly life—the old granite hills, facing the tempests of a thousand

years, and the grass roots that quickened and slept with the seasons. All of these things had a life of their own and spoke their language to him.

Why was she lonely? His mind groped after the question, refusing to let it go. He knew. She missed the things which life had taught her meant everything to such as she; things whose names were written on the piece of paper in his pocket. She would never be able to do without them, fine clothes, and dainty food, and men and women to wait on her. He sighed. He was only a poor cow-puncher and it would be a long time before those white faces turned themselves into a fat balance at the bank.

He realized with a guilty thrill the direction in which his thoughts were straying. He hadn't any right to think of her at all; she hardly looked at him, even when she spoke to him. To her, he was merely a figure who stood where her relative should stand. What would she think if she knew the truth?

His musings had turned to gloomy forboding when he came in sight of the Desmond shack, a queer place, patched together with tarred paper, uneven boards, and beaten-out tin cans. There was no fence around the quarter section and no sign of a crop. The ragged corral beyond the house was empty except for the dejected pony that belonged to Desmond himself. It was the worst piece of land in the valley, and how its owner made a living was one of the mysteries that men ceased to wonder about. Billie had seen the place a hundred times without giving its poverty and dilapidation a second thought, but now he felt a sudden qualm of disgust at the dirt, the pile of empty cans before the door. He knew Little Britches was at home, for he saw her horse, looking hard-ridden, tied to a post, though there was no sign of the rider.

"Why don't she clean up instead of tearin' around ropin' wild horses?" he thought, dissatisfied with his little friend for the first time. He had not meant to stop, but the rattle of the buckboard brought the girl and her father to the door.

Barney Desmond had a face whose Celtic good-humor was belied by the shifting eyes and furtive droop of his whole body. He

was shiftless and lazy, and the ranchmen held him in contempt, but no one had ever studied him enough to see that he was evil as well. He called loudly after Billie Stranger and cursed viciously when the wagon did not stop.

"I wanted some terbaccy," he complained. "Now somebody 'll have to ride plumb to th' Forks."

His daughter, whose picturesque nickname was never heard at home, turned from her somber gazing after the fast disappearing wagon.

"I reckon you mean me," she said briefly. "Get in th' house. Don't be bawlin' after folks that 'd kick you outa their way if you happened in it."

He obeyed her, snarling.

"You limb of Satan. Some day I'll wear you out with a strap-handle!" Ten minutes later he was beguiling. "Can't you fix your poor old dad a snack of somethin', Molly, darlin'? You're gone afther th' horses from mornin' till night, lavin' me hungry."

And he sat poring over a greasy pack of cards in perfect content, while in the narrow cook-room she rattled disdainfully among the no less greasy pans with the light gone out of her eyes.

Billie Stranger made it into Cat Fork in good time, and with no sign of his inner perturbation, presented his list to Doc Gates, who made an occasion of it, spelling out Mrs. Moffatt's clear characters in a way that set Billie's teeth on edge.

"If you ain't got them things in your blamed one-hoss store, get 'em. Pronto!" he commanded crossly. He expected every minute that the storekeeper's interest in the strange document would arouse the always lively curiosity of the other men who lounged in front of the door, and that they would want to know with a certain deadly, persistent familiarity, why he was buying fancy groceries instead of attending to man-business.

They would know; the whole valley would know, sooner or later, for this was one of the bits of news sure to travel like an east wind into every crevice, but just now Billie was not in the mood for cross-questioning. He wanted to fulfil his mis-

sion and get out of Cat Fork as quickly as possible, for the spell of Geraldine Hoyt was wearing off a little and his conscience was beginning to hurt him for duties left undone.

"Whar d'ye expect me tuh git aigs this time of year?" grumbled Doc Gates. "What's got int' you, Billie Stranger? Ain't my stores good enough fer any cow-man on this range?"

Something was happening in the street outside. There were no more saloons in Cat Fork; those pleasant, secure old days when a man might always locate another in the time it took to stroll from Jake's place to the Palace Bar, were no more, and those who used to congregate in these two popular spots waiting for the world and its ways to come to them, now milled aimlessly about the wide, dusty street. Lassitude flourished everywhere.

But suddenly, while Doc Gates peered through his spectacles at Mrs. Moffatt's list and Billie waited impatiently for the result, this lassitude changed to a whispering activity.

"I wonder what ails th' boys?" Doc Gates leaned over his counter, forgetting business in a new interest.

A curious animation had come over the lazing idlers, drawing them together in little groups, imbuing their passivity with a certain tense expectancy. A whisper ran through the air like a train of sparks, dying as it flashed its message.

"Th' boys have heard some news," said Billie Stranger, walking to the door.

The Spot Cash Store was directly opposite the building which had once housed the Palace Bar, and from where Billie stood he had an oblique view of the door that opened from the corner of the vacant saloon. There were plenty of vacant buildings in Cat Fork and nobody had the hardihood to open a business in the location that had seen so many sorrows down. It was in this place that Billie Stranger himself had won his ranch with his famous call on threes, and unconsciously his eyes turned to the door where he would never enter again. Once the Palace Bar would have housed this excitement, whatever it was, but now a

single man stood alone in the entrance. He stood far back, concealed by the door, which was half open; from the street he would not be noticed, and from the store opposite his face was not discernible. His attitude was of intense watchfulness; he did not seem to see the groups in the street or share their interest.

Billie's eyes wandered. Along the dusty street horses stood at intervals tied to hitching-posts or with their reins dragging. There were others, his own team among them, in the feed-yard behind the blacksmith's shop. A man came out of the Dillon Hotel and advanced toward one of the groups who stood here and there united by this common whisper. He was a tall, lean-faced man with a star on his breast and he walked with an air of authority.

"Thar's Sheriff Cooper," said Doc Gates with a relieved sigh. "Now we'll know what it's about."

"An' there's Milt Holley," Billie added with interest. "When did he come back and where's he been?"

Milt Holley, who had been one of the group the sheriff was about to join, left it at that moment and advanced to meet Cooper. He was a lean, mahogany-faced cowboy, similar to a dozen others, but in a minute he was the most important figure in Cat Fork.

No man but Billie Stranger saw what happened. At the moment of the meeting of Cooper and Milt Holley which caused their isolation in the middle of the street, he had turned his gaze to the man in the Palace Bar door.

He saw this hidden figure lean forward for a better view and saw the flash of the gun that followed. A second later his own gun echoed the roar of the first, and the man in the saloon door threw up a hand from which the blood spattered in a little crimson shower. His gun went spinning into the street and was trampled on a dozen times before it was recovered. The crowd, roaring out a sudden fury for revenge, bore down upon the Spot Cash store, and Billie Stranger saw beyond them a still figure lying face downward in the dust.

Milt Holley was dead!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

His Terrible Dawn



By William Merriam Rouse

THE wide, low doorway of the blacksmith shop gaped red and black to Mark Rowland, as though it were the grinning mouth of a small hell. The tinkle and clang of iron on anvil met him; and the hiss and spat of hot iron in water. He could see the skinny-armed master of the place outlined against the glare of the forge. More like a crow than a blacksmith. Rowland wanted to talk to old Aaron Hardy, and he walked straight into the place with his chin drawn in and his knotty fists swinging. He went in expecting trouble because of Hardy's silent attitude toward him these six months past.

Cling-cling-cling! Three times a mighty hammer in the hand of old Hardy came down upon a red bar. Then he stopped, and blew up the forge so that the light of the charcoal and the light of day from the door mingled and revealed him fully. His lips did not move, but there was a grin in his deep eyes as he waited with an arm that seemed to be all hair and freckles and bone resting upon the handle of the bellows.

His eyebrows, which reached out like the feelers of an ant, wagged with his habit of lifting them, first one and then the other, when inquiry was in his mind. That was what gave that look of sardonic humor to his eyes, Rowland decided. For Hardy to

waggle his eyebrows was a bad beginning, because not only did the act itself annoy the younger man, but it reminded him of too many times when his statements to the blacksmith had met with the same reply, and silence.

"Aaron," he began, balancing upon the balls of his feet, "I've come to see you about Edith."

The eyebrows drew a little nearer to each other and came to rest. Hardy waited a matter of half a minute before he spoke, and then his words were slow.

"I thought you'd come about her, Mark, as soon as I heard you was going to build a dam above the gorge."

"Yes," said Rowland, "the dam 'll be finished this fall. In the spring I'll bring a big drive of logs down the Dunder and I'll have a mill ready to saw them by the time they're out of the river and piled. I'll be able to give Edith as good as anybody's got in Dunder Gorge."

Upon that he rested his case. Hardy knew as well as he himself did that he was thirty years old, a wildcat in a fight, and considered one of the most promising young men in the county.

"You said anything to Edith?" asked the blacksmith.

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"It's all right with her. She said to come to you."

"Huh!" It was impossible to guess what that grunt expressed. "You ought to build the dam below the gorge, Mark, and put in a gristmill instead of a sawmill."

"The place for a mill pond is above the gorge," answered Rowland sharply. He had not come there to talk about his business affairs.

"My idea about that ain't the same as yours, Mark."

"Well?"

"You mean you want I should say something about Edith?" One of the shaggy eyebrows raised and lowered.

"Yes!" Rowland laughed, although with a touch of impatience and apprehension.

"I guess I won't say anything, Mark."

It was the answer that Rowland had not expected. For a moment he stood stunned, while Hardy's arm went up and down with the handle of the bellows and blew the fire to brightness again. Now the figure of the old man looked actually diabolical to him.

"That means you're against me!" said Rowland, in a low voice. "And I don't think she'll marry me unless you say you're friendly."

"Neither do I!" Aaron Hardy looked him squarely in the face. "Not that she ain't welcome to if she wants to. I wouldn't ever treat either one of you any different."

"That's the devil of it! That's why she doesn't want to go against you."

"Yes."

That quality which made Mark Rowland, of medium height and of no great weight, feared by men twice his size, now rose in its strength within him. Of course he would not make one of his tiger-like leaps at the father of the girl he wanted to marry, but he could and did hurl at him an accusation with all the force of a blow.

"You're holding off to see whether I make money out of my mill or not!"

"It ought to be below the gorge," replied Hardy, without raising his voice. "Suppose you get a freshet, or anything else goes wrong, and your logs go down through the gorge? It would cost more 'n they'd be worth to haul 'em back with

teams. They'd be scattered all the way from here to the lake. And you can't have a sawmill below the gorge on account of the trouble of running logs through it—not with profit."

"Nothing will go wrong," said Rowland. "I'll see to that!"

"A grist mill below the gorge would grind grist and make flour for you fine and easy with that fall of water."

Now Rowland became confirmed in belief that the whole matter was a question of his prosperity. That Aaron Hardy's opinion of his abilities was far from his own enraged him.

"I'll build a dam and sawmill above the gorge in spite of you or God Almighty Himself!" he growled, with outthrust head. "And I'll marry Edith! You don't know me, Aaron Hardy!"

"I know they call you the iron man, Mark," said the blacksmith, without a change in voice or manner. "I've worked with iron all my life."

"See what you can do with me, then!" Rowland turned with this and walked toward the doorway. "I'll build the dam and make the money and marry the girl!"

He passed out into the sunlight, and he had not gone a dozen steps before the renewed sound of hammer and anvil came to him, just as though his visit had been of no importance. Clang! That would be cold iron that old Aaron struck. Clang-clang-clang! Let him pound! He would have more luck with his iron than with the iron man. Mark Rowland had made up his mind to follow his nose in a direct line into the future and toward Edith. Let who would stand in the way and get bumped!

He went straight to the brown, low-eaved house where Aaron Hardy and his daughter had always lived. At this time in the afternoon she would be in her garden: he walked around the house and found her there, as softly brown of hair and eyes as the soft dress that she wore. She was the glow in which his iron softened. Just at that moment he glimpsed a kinship between the look in her eyes for him and the look in her spaniel's eyes for her—between her and the September brown

and gold of the world. She made him feel like that, in flashes.

"Your father won't give his consent," he said. The dog stretched up against his leg, but he brushed it away, absently. "It amounts to that—he seemed to be against me."

"And you quarreled?" She smiled as she asked the question, and Rowland marveled.

"Yes, in a way. I'm sorry." He was sincere enough, although the firmness of his purpose was not lightened by so much as the weight of her little finger.

"I thought you would." She looked away, toward the forest back of the village. Rowland stepped nearer to her and tried to take her in his arms. She lifted her hand, a slender white barrier between them, and his arms fell to his sides.

"You—" He found his tongue thick and unwieldy. "You weren't—like this—last night!"

"No, Mark, I wasn't!"

"But I think you knew he'd be against me—I think so now!"

"I did!" She smiled into his eyes. "That's why I kissed you!"

Rowland felt himself tinged with a red blush. One of the things he loved most about her was what he called her iron frankness. Nevertheless it often startled him.

"Maybe you know what made him do it?" he asked, being certain that he himself understood the motive.

"No, I don't. I just felt that he was going to."

"And what shall we do?" He asked the question hesitatingly, for it touched the crux of the matter, his happiness.

"Wait!" The word etched itself miserably upon his consciousness. Even until then he had cherished a little hope that she would stand with him and defy Aaron Hardy. "You go ahead with your plans, Mark."

Black disappointment began to creep upon him; and with it came the wrath that flourishes in darkness. Wrath against the old crow, Hardy, who was casting his shadow over them.

"Does that mean that you won't marry

me, Edith? Are you holding off, like him, to see—"

He stopped. That was an unworthy thought with respect to her, for he knew that the giving of her love was not conditioned upon anything—that it was his own, now, and that it was only herself which she withheld.

"It's hard," she said softly. "All I know is that he has been right in the past. If he said 'You can't marry Mark Rowland!' I'd go over to the parsonage with you right now. It's just because I think he must have a good reason for being against it, Mark!"

"He knows mighty well how to boss you!" cried Rowland. Then he shut his teeth hard upon the flood of words that sought to come. She had by inference given him to understand that there was a possibility of her not marrying him, and he dared not drive too hard just then.

"He couldn't boss me," she replied, without anger.

Rowland waited, hesitating. Then the iron in him demanded the worst.

"You won't marry me?" he asked. "Is that it?"

"I won't say that, Mark!" There was a film of tears in her eyes now, although she still smiled. "I want him to feel differently about it."

He swept her into his arms and kissed her half a dozen times. She did not resist, but there was the feeling that he held only the body of Edith Hardy. He let her go so suddenly that she staggered.

"I'll make him change his mind!" he cried; and he went out of the garden, leaving her there with the uneasy spaniel whining at her feet.

He had the key, he felt. She would not marry him without her father's approval, but when the piles of sawn lumber rose in his mill-yard the objection of old Aaron Hardy would be gone. That was it. And if Rowland had not been the one affected he would have said that the old man was sensible in asking some sort of prosperity in the man who was to marry his daughter.

"I'll make him come to time in less than a year," muttered Rowland, as he went back to the head of the gorge where his

men were at work. "Or, by the rusty hinges of hell, I'll break myself!"

With that resolution driven into his mind as the spike of a peevy drives into a log, Mark Rowland set out to get more work out of his gang of plaid-shirted huskies than any man had ever got before. He did it. In the first place they liked him, and they were willing to be driven to a certain extent. His will, and the desire to do a good job with which he inspired them, accomplished the rest so that when the upper stretches of the Dunder, above the gorge, finally froze over for the winter, the river found itself expanded into a mill pond behind the dam which Rowland and his men had built.

Of course there were difficulties. As on the frosty October morning when Mike Powers, Rowland's foreman, balked at an order to lead his men waist deep into the river to stop a newly developed leak in the dam. Upon that occasion Rowland climbed up the front of Mike Powers, and for thirty minutes the men, who were lumberjacks in winter, river drivers in spring, and jacks of all trades in the summer and fall, saw as good a fight as the Adirondacks had furnished them in half a dozen years.

Powers lay on the floor of Dr. Shattuck's office until the doctor came driving in from his long round of calls, and it was ten days before he was able to go to work again. Rowland worked the day of the fight. He himself led the gang, his battered hands and face staining the Dunder with tiny streaks of red, out to the leak in the dam. He got the work done. Not only the long, wooden dam itself, with buttments and sluice and gate, but a log runway for the mill which was to be.

During this time Rowland kept away from the quiet brown house of the Hardys, and he found no occasion to go to the blacksmith shop. Without a legitimate reason he did not intend to seek out Aaron Hardy again until he could lead the old man out of his shop and point to a wheel turning above the gorge—bid him listen to the sound of a whirring saw, making good logs into lumber.

It came about, however, that he had an honest errand at the shop when he began

to make his arrangements, during the winter, for the drive. He needed some iron-work, and many feet of chain for the boom which, come spring, would be stretched from shore to shore above the pond to hold back the mighty flood of logs he expected to bring down from the woods on high water. It was right and natural that he should order his chains and iron work there in Dunder Gorge.

The fierce eyebrows of Aaron Hardy wagged a question when Rowland entered the shop, but as he began to state his errand they settled to rest, and by the time the specifications for the chains were fully made, the old man was as kindly as though there had never been a word of quarrel between them. He promised the chains at a just price, and that such of the ironwork as was to be hand forged should be ready well before there was need for it. Mark Rowland knew that Hardy had always kept his word both in letter and in spirit with the men of Dunder Gorge, and he should have gone away from the black cavern of the shop with his mind at rest.

But this was not the case. As to the delivery of the work and the time of payment he was satisfied: his feeling of unrest was due to something deeper and more vague than the matter of a log-chain or a ring-bolt. In the presence of Hardy he felt that he stood before something which iron could not pierce, or, piercing, could not conquer. The same quality was in Edith. In her it was like the breath of June to him: in her father the same quality roused a swift madness of desire to crush. This much he recognized; and he resolved to beat it out of the way in the old man just as he expected to take it to himself in the girl.

The winter drew on toward spring. The snows came, and piled high, and began to melt; while Mark Rowland grew in stature among the men of the countryside. He was about to take his place in that unformed but definite group to which belonged Alexander Peabody, the principal storekeeper and town supervisor, the Rev. Ellery Phinney, Dr. Shattuck, and the rest who had made places of importance for themselves. They had seen him grow, and

they seemed to like the spirit with which he attacked life.

For it was no small thing for a young man to risk all his savings in a venture like building a sawmill above the gorge. Only Mark Rowland, the iron man, could make a go of it, they said. If it succeeded, as it seemed destined to, it would help the village and bring what was wealth for that place to its owner.

Early in April the ice went out of the river. With that event the plans and preparations of Mark Rowland came to fruit. The dam withstood the impact of ice and the steady drive of rushing water, and Rowland's faith in his works was justified. His drive started back in the lumber woods, near the headwaters of the Dunder. His teams began to draw in material for the sawmill. Aaron Hardy delivered the iron-work and the chains, and the boom was stretched across the river in anticipation of the logs.

Black and glistening they came upon the swelling breast of the Dunder. At first by ones and twos and threes, then gathering in clusters, and then the gleaming, mud-died water grew dark with them and a great raft formed behind the confines of the boom—itself made of logs chained end to end.

Back from it for fully a mile up the river, which had widened its banks because of the dam, the sticks of timber lay level and almost motionless, with the stream driving underneath. The spiked boots of a driver could walk as upon a floor from bank to bank of the river.

The Dunder rose swift and high that year, on account of the heavy snows, yet it was not worse than elderly men could remember having seen before. Rowland, however, found it necessary to trip the gate of his dam, by knocking out the planks, so that part of the excess of water could go roaring through the sluice. Otherwise the water might have risen above the leeway allowed to the boom by its chains, with the result that the logs would have floated over it.

On the day when the Dunder neared its own high-water mark the drive was practically in. The gang was tailing up along

the course of the river, and shortly they would come in to the village. Then the logs would be let into the mill pond gradually, drawn out, and piled ready for the saw. Rowland considered the situation and was satisfied.

At the end of that day, which had been lowering and with a hint of rain in the air, he sat upon a stump at one end of the boom and wondered whether he should remain up through the night of rising water or go to bed. There did not seem to be any cause for alarm. The boom chains appeared to have play sufficient, water was roaring through the sluice and over the dam, and unless the river were to break all records by many inches he had nothing to fear in that direction.

It was more a feeling that he was bound up in this child of his will than any fear for its safety that made him determine to remain there until dawn. The danger had been mainly that the dam would not stand against the rush of ice and the later volume of water, but it had stood, and so far as could be seen there was not a leak to be found in it.

Rowland brought himself blankets, a lantern, and a lunch, and settled down with his pipe; more comfortable than he had been in months. The thing was done. Tomorrow the men would come in and begin to handle the logs. In a few weeks he could lead old Aaron forth from his shop and point to piles of sawn lumber. His mind leaped to Edith and June, month of brides.

Rowland smoked and ate and catnapped with his back against a log. The rain held off, so he was dry and warm in his blankets; and if he could have seen the children of his dreams, the boom and dam, he would have been quite happy. But he could hear them through the darkness—the hissing of water under the logs and the roar of the cataract that poured over the dam and down into the gorge.

The black night wore itself out slowly, and at length he could see a difference between earth and sky. Tree masses grew against the lighter heavens. The clouds broke and a pale star looked at him. Grayness came over the earth and the rushing

waters. The lantern dimmed. When he could distinguish the logs as separate things he put it out and rose. His notched stick at the water's edge showed that the river had fallen an inch or more. He had seen the night through; now he could eat and prepare for the day's work that lay ahead of him.

Then struck that blow which had been swinging toward him behind the screen of his perceptions. The final glance which he threw at the taut boom met the parting of a link in the chain that held the log nearest the bank to its mooring, a two foot thick oak. That end of chain jerked and fell slack. The other end disappeared into the water. The log swung out. Slowly the whole boom moved, and with it stirred and moved the mass of logs behind.

A pioneer stick of timber darted toward the freedom of the mill pond, and toward the dam. Another, and others followed. The boom swung wider open. The logs moved out like a mighty host. They responded as a whole to the sweeping current of the river.

The boom strung itself out along the opposite shore. It was wide open now. Irresistible, mightier many times than the hand of man, the log horde gathered force. It thundered against the dam, it clogged the sluice, its members upreared themselves and tumbled like acrobats.

The dam went away as though it had been a toy of mud and little sticks. It melted into the frothing, log-flecked deluge that poured down the gorge; a flood that spumed against the rock walls and splintered the solid butts of timber and would grow calmer only when it came to the low-lying, placid course of the river beyond. The dam was gone, the logs were going, the mill was useless.

Motionless Mark Rowland watched the physical thing happen: motionless he remained while home to him came the understanding of what it meant. The prosperity that he had created had melted out of his grasp. With it went the approval of Aaron Hardy, the marriage with Edith, and beyond that the life he had desired and fought for. Gone in less than five minutes of gray dawn.

Why? He had done everything toward success that his brain could conceive, and he had built with a sure hand and the force of a great will. With slow movements he went toward the oak where the boom had been moored. He followed the chain down to the edge of the water and began to draw it in slowly. There must be some answer in things themselves, and first of all he wanted to find out why the chain had parted. If the water had suddenly swept to unheard of heights he could have understood it—but not the parting of the chain.

Part of a broken link lay in his hand. This was the link that had let his future go down the gorge, and he saw that it had a flaw in it. Not a completely hidden flaw, but one which he thought should have shown itself to a careful eye, which he believed should have given off a false ring to careful ears. Had Aaron Hardy, then, not tested the chain that he had sold and for which he had been responsible? Or had he tested it and wilfully let it pass with the flaw in it?

"He knew the boom would not hold with a chain like that," whispered Rowland, "and he took that way of getting rid of me!"

Now he hated Aaron Hardy. He had that which his mind subconsciously demanded—a person other than himself to blame for his disaster. Old Hardy became the personal devil in his world. He dropped the chain upon the wet, torn grass, and turned his face toward the village. It had grown to clear daylight, and the old man would be at work, for he rose early. Rowland walked rapidly.

"I'll crush the life out of him as he's crushed me!" he said, with the same determination he had brought to the building of his dam at the head of the gorge.

The doors of the blacksmith shop were open to the morning. The ring and clang of iron came out with a sound hateful to Rowland. Into the place of shadows, into the red glare of the forge, he walked with a long and steady stride. The crowlike figure of Hardy was blocked against the glow. He turned with a sooty face, and at sight of the visitor his eyebrows twitched

up and down. He stood between the forge and the anvil, a big hammer in his powerful fist.

"The logs went down the river," announced Rowland, in a voice choked but clear enough, "and took the dam with them."

"It was a big risk, building at the head of the gorge," said Hardy, without surprise.

"There was a bad link in one of the chains you sold me—a flaw!"

"They's a flaw in most everything, one way or another, Mark!"

If it had been possible Rowland would have hated him more for that. He took a step nearer.

"I'm going to take it out of your hide and bone, you old buzzard!" he growled. "Piece by piece and inch by inch! A piece for every link in that damned chain!"

The old man looked at him in silence, his brows shifting slowly out of place and back again. When he spoke it was with calmness.

"You do as you think best," he said, "but first off I want you should watch me a minute."

He bent swiftly and picked up a cold bar. Rowland did not move to interfere. He was indifferent as to whether his revenge began on the instant or a minute later. Time no more mattered. And he was contemptuous of any defense old Aaron could make, even with hammer or bar.

Upon the cold iron the hammer fell with a harsh clang-clang that billowed and broke against the roof and walls of the shop. Aaron dropped his hammer and thrust the bar into the white hot heart of the forge. He jammed the bellows handle up and down, sweating. In a moment he lifted the bar out with his tongs and held it to the anvil. Clink-clink! Sparks red and gold broke out in plumes from the hammer. The end of the bar was bent over in a beautiful right angle. Aaron tossed it into a tub of water. His hands dropped to his sides. The hammer and tongs thumped and clattered upon the floor.

"That's all, Mark," he said. "You watched me! You got to work with iron

—not against it. I been working iron all my life."

The strangeness of the thing stayed Rowland's hand long enough so that he realized that the old man was standing defenseless before him. Why didn't the old fool fight? What did he mean? Rowland swung a menacing fist.

"What's that got to do with the link in the chain?" he demanded. "What's that got to do with me, damn you?"

"It's the same with water," persisted Hardy, standing still. "You got to work with it! You got to work with things unless you want to get smashed."

"With it?" Rowland stared at him. There was an idea somewhere in that. It glimmered, flirting with his mind, and grew into a light. "You mean a grist mill below the gorge would have been working with the river?"

"Yes, Mark. But you've always set your mind on making things do what you wanted 'em to."

"By Heavens," muttered Rowland softly, "I'll make the river carry those logs with it to the lake, and I'll sell 'em for enough that will pay all my debts, anyway!"

"Thank the Lord!" The eyebrows of Aaron Hardy jerked and trembled. "It did seem as if you never would learn it! But I thought you'd bend, if you was real iron like they say!"

No more did Mark Rowland have any desire to batter, or to kill. But he had paid a price for the knowledge of his iron obstinacy, and the remembrance of that price filled him with a sadness grayer than his terrible dawn at the boom.

"Yes, Aaron, I guess I've learned something," he said. "But I'm ruined just the same."

"Ruined?" snapped Hardy. "You're made in the fire! You go along over to my house and tell Edith to get you some hot breakfast!"

"Aaron!" cried Rowland. "Do you mean that Edith—that you—"

"You do as I told you!" answered the blacksmith. His eyebrows fairly danced a jig. "I was only waiting for you to find the flaw in yourself!"

Tiger

by Max Brand

Author of "The Night Horseman," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JACK LODGE, only son of an old, aristocratic and wealthy family, has spent most of the eight years or so since leaving college in big game hunting and the search for strenuous adventures in the out-of-the-way corners of the earth. His family, however, having decided that it was time he settled down, married and provided an heir for the Lodge name and fortune, he promised his mother to give six months to social duties. From this resolve, however, he is subtly seduced by his friend Cecil Darling, a somewhat embittered man for forty-five, the last of his line, quite alone in the world and a noted and devoted big game hunter.

In search of an old gunsmith who lives in the slums, Jack witnesses the mobbing of a taxi-driver by a mob, and the quelling of the latter by an amazingly beautiful and vital young woman who he learns—from his valet, Henry Sanford, an unusual and efficient character—is one Mary Dover, daughter of a one-time saloonkeeper, now dead, whose bar she conducts as a soft drink and noon lunch place. Impressed, Jack persuades the valet to take him there in disguise. It is easy to see that the Chuck-a-Luck, as it is called, is a principal center of the underworld and as dangerous a dive for an outsider as any jungle.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAP.

JACK turned to Sanford. The valet sat looking straight at his soup, eating busily, but something about him told Jack that his companion was watching every corner of the room with intent interest.

"What was that hiss?" he asked curiously.

"A watchword, sir."

"While we're in this place, call me Jack."

"Very good."

"A watchword among whom; the underworld?"

"The criminal portion of it, you might say. It's both a warning, a signal, and a call for help, according to the occasion."

"A warning, a signal—" Jack started. "Does that mean the girl is in touch with the criminal world?"

"I told you about the paralytic, old Whitey, who finances the soup-kitchen here? He has an interest in criminals; a sort of philanthropist, and he does what he can for them. His idea is that hunger

is the cause of most crimes, and he's trying to remove some of that cause. That's why Mary Dover served you as soon as she heard the signal."

"Well," said Jack, "it makes things easy for us."

"Easy?" echoed Sanford. "I tell you the best thing we could do would be to get up and walk out of this place."

"You mean we're in danger?" Sanford shifted his position to the edge of his chair; it might have been to draw closer to the table, but it also put him in excellent place to rise quickly.

"Look at the girl and the bouncer," said Sanford from the corner of his mouth.

"What about them? They're laughing together."

"Don't look at them!" whispered Sanford sharply. "Get them from the corner of your eye. They're laughing, but that's a frame. Notice they stop smiling when they talk."

And Jack, observing them cautiously as he had been warned to do, discovered that Mary and Larry Boynton interspersed their

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 8.

smiles with instants of grave concern while they talked. It was only a moment before the bouncer left her and moved away.

"What does it mean?"

"She saw through you. Did you hear her ask you if they called you 'Soapy' because you kept clean? She saw through you, and every minute we spend in this place is dangerous. Have you seen enough of the girl?"

"I'm just beginning to be interested, Sanford."

The latter glanced up quickly.

"I might have known," he muttered to himself. "I'm a fool!"

A middle-aged fellow with his cap pushed back from his bald head leaned against the wall near Jack.

"Soapy!" he whispered.

The other lighted a cigarette, and at the same time spoke from behind his hand.

"I'm Lew McGuire."

"Don't recall you, Lew."

"Sure, you don't know my mush; forget my name, too?"

"Well?"

"You remember the job you pulled at Van Sicklen's in Chi?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was one of the facers."

"Of course," nodded Jack.

Lew McGuire puffed out a cloud of smoke and behind it he said: "See you later. Just wanted to tip you off that I was around. If you got anything on, wise me up later."

And he sauntered away and disappeared. Jack turned to his valet, smiling.

"As a bluffer," said he, "what do you think of me?"

"As a bluffer," said Sanford, and he looked Jack in the eye in a manner which Jack had never known before, "you're the worst in the world."

"Eh?"

"It means they know you're playing a part. If you want to get out of here without trouble, you haven't a minute to act."

"What's wrong?"

"Everything. This Lew McGuire was sent over here by Boynton to draw you out and he's done it. Didn't you feel me step on your foot when he asked that question?"

"What of that?"

"There was never any Van Sicklen job in Chicago; and McGuire never acted as facer for any Soapy Jack. He was lying and he knows now that you're lying. Will you leave before this becomes serious?"

He added quickly: "It isn't dodging danger: it's merely using common sense."

But Jack Lodge leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

"My cards are on the table, Sanford, but I'm not going to run. Besides, what can they do? They can't draw a gun on me in the middle of the daylight city, can they?"

"They'll find a way to put you in the wrong and throw you out. They've passed the word around already; you're known; not a hand would be raised to help you."

"Not even yours, Sanford."

"Mine?"

"I have your word that you won't mix up in any mess here."

"You hold me to that?"

"I do. I think you're glad to be out of it, Sanford."

"I am, sir."

"Gad, you're frank about it!"

"It's a lesson that has to be learned. Sir, a man may come to windward of a rhino thirty yards away with bare hands and still dodge trouble; but a man who purposely comes to windward of the Tangle even if he has the police and half a dozen revolvers with him—"

"Is a fool, Sanford?"

The valet refused to smile.

"At least, I'm enjoying my folly. That's one advantage. As for passing the word about, that's nonsense. I haven't heard a murmur. Haven't seen a single pair of them murmur."

"They have means of wireless communication here, and they don't have to whisper. They can try a man by a look, judge him by a gesture, and condemn him with a lifting of the brows."

"Give me a proof."

"You'll get it in a moment or two without any need of an interpreter. Look around you; what do you see?"

"Nothing unusual."

"The noon hour is ended; the soup line is through—we're the last of 'em. This

place ought to be empty except for one or two strays; but there are still twenty men around. I tell you, the word has been passed. Half of these fellows are newcomers. And see that they have taken none of the tables near us. They give us a semicircle of free room."

"Sanford, I think you're right; and if you are, we'd better clear out."

"I know I'm right. What's Mary Dover doing, fussing away behind her counter?"

Jack had pushed back his chair to rise, but now he settled forward in it.

"She's come to watch me thrown out?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"Sanford, I stay here."

"That's final?"

"Absolutely!"

They were so intent in this last interchange of words that neither of them saw Lew McGuire approach again toward their table. He came sauntering, busy rolling a cigarette as he walked, but just opposite them, he stumbled and, with a cry, sprawled forward upon his knees. He was up instantly, and whirled on them with a contorted face.

"You damned paperhanger!" he yelled, and thrust out his arm at Jack. "What d'ye mean by trippin' me?"

"It's come!" groaned Sanford softly. "It's come!"

But oddly enough, where Jack looked was not into the glittering eyes of McGuire, but toward the soup-counter, and there he saw Mary Dover with both bare elbows resting upon the board and her chin in her hands. There was just the hint of a light in her face, just the suggestion of a smile on her lips, and with the shadow framing her behind she looked like the painting of some disdainful beauty.

"I didn't trip you," said Jack calmly, and he was aware that Mary Dover sneered.

"You lie!" cried Lew McGuire.

He tossed his hat into a corner and rolled up his sleeves. If his bald head seemed middle-aged his muscles were young indeed; he stood with feet ready for the fight.

"He lies," added another man, turning in his chair. "I seen that bird trip Lew."

"That's an ugly word," said Jack, "as ugly as your face."

He stood up, but made no movement toward McGuire.

"If you were three inches taller and twenty pounds heavier, my friend, and ten years younger, I'd argue the point with you. But"—here he stepped from behind his table and stood resting one hand leisurely upon it—"I've no mind to start fighting you, McGuire, and be jumped by the rest of your pack."

He indicated the alert semicircle with a sweep of his hand, and a growl answered him; he saw a dozen eyes flash toward Mary Dover, but she shook her head—an almost negligible motion—and the bright eyes turned back upon Jack impatiently. McGuire himself, though still keeping a bold front, swayed back a little, as though the height of his opponent startled and surprised him.

"I've heard a good deal about the gang at the Chuck-a-Luck," went on Jack, tossing aside his cap and slipping out of his coat, "and I thought I'd find some hard ones here, some Americans; but I see only a crew of sneaking rotters ready to mob a man. I'm not going to fight McGuire"—the growl was converted swiftly to a sneer—"he's too small. Bring out your bully; where's Larry Boynton?"

There was amazement in the faces before him, but a vague joy with it; and at the same time the giant materialized from the back room.

"Who's hollerin' for me?" he said and, stepping to within half a pace of Jack, he surveyed him with a brutal, calm content.

"Green goods!" said Larry Boynton, and the Chuck-a-Luck laughed.

"Not your fists, Larry!" called Mary Dover, and her voice was broken with laughter. "Don't hurt the boob!"

"Anything you say, Mary. On your way, Bud!"

And Jack was instantly in the arms of the giant. At the first touch of those big hands he knew a strength before which his own was helpless; the fingers closed on his shoulder with such terrific power that they seared the flesh. Once in close grips and he was lost; he wrenched his right arm free, and, as the grinning face lunged toward him, struck up. He had learned how to put

every ounce of his weight behind a short punch, and now he had a desperate horror added to his strength.

His fists cracked home on what pugilists call the "button," that is, just a little to one side of the point of the jaw. It seemed impossible that any man could stand under the force of that blow; his own arm was numb to the shoulder from the jar of it, and he waited to see the giant topple; but, though Boynton's head snapped back he did not fall. At most, it threw him off his balance and he reeled away.

CHAPTER VIII.

BATTLE.

IF their own champion had gained this initial success the men of the Chuck-a-Luck could not have yelled louder; and through the clamor cut the voice of Mary Dover: "Fair fight! Fair fight! Give 'em room!"

Chairs and tables were swept away by magic; a circle opened before Jack, and behind the counter he saw Mary, with her eyes on fire. In that dim corner shadows fell about her, but her pale face seemed to be cherished by a light.

Boynton had gone back on his heels; now he jerked up his head and cast an ugly laugh toward his admirers by way of telling them that this was an accident and would not be repeated. Then he lunged; he seemed to Jack a face that was all jaw, with two glittering eyes half buried in a squint. He came sprawling, his feet out of that straight line by which a fine boxer advances and retreats without losing his poise, and his fists were dropped low, ready to swing with full momentum. Jack saw with a sudden ecstasy that the man was open, wide open. He stepped in swiftly and drove in both fists in a perfect one-two punch, the impacts sounding almost like one blow. From his toes to his finger-tips every ounce of weight and power in his body shot into those efforts; then he gave back a little to allow the giant to topple forward on his face, for each of those punches had whipped home on the point of Boynton's jaw. But the head of the big man merely

rolled back, forward again, and a tremendous swing was driven at Jack's head.

He saw that fist start three feet away, and he had time to plant himself and block; the hand struck his forearm like a club, smashed it back against his face, drove him reeling against the wall. The very strength of that blow saved him from being finished by the companion swing which Boynton started the next instant; for the first punch pushed him away, and the second whizzed past his face. He felt a sickening brush of air, and while the bouncer lunged wide, following his swing, Jack slipped away from the wall and into the center of the open space.

He felt that sick horror which comes to a man who is fighting against some inhuman power, a rising tide, for instance, or some mad beast. About him, not one of the spectators uttered a sound; they leaned with viciously illumined faces, drinking in every movement of the battle, and Jack knew that silence was necessary in the Chuck-a-Luck; for that matter, he could be killed and torn in pieces and there would still be not a whisper.

Over in the corner he saw Sanford, whose right hand was twisted oddly behind him—reaching for a gun?—he shook his head, and Sanford's hand came slowly from behind his back. He observed all these things in a glittering second between peril and peril; Boynton was wheeling around clumsily, like a huge ship which has striven to run down an opponent and now turns about for a second attempt.

The wrists of Jack ached from those three terrific blows he had shot home against his enemy; and that enemy remained as indifferent as if an ironclad had been pelted by a bean-shooter. No; one effect at least had been gained. When Boynton wheeled the glint of his eyes was red, bright red; and every line of his face meant murder. Those blows had hurt him enough to raise the devil in him and at the sight of his face, Jack heard a shuddering sigh of delighted terror from the spectators; it was a finish fight, then, and he would as soon have been placed naked in a Roman arena with a stylus in his hand to face the rush of a lion.

The floor quivered under the stamp of

Boynton's feet as he leaped in, and his mouth was working as though he were speaking to himself. For an instant Jack was paralyzed; then he dropped almost to the floor, felt the danger shoot past and above him, and rose unharmed while Boynton crashed into the crowd and overturned three or four men and chairs.

"Pretty, pretty, pretty!" cried the girl behind the counter. "Keep away!"

That was it. If he could keep away he might be safe. His wind was perfectly sound; it came now as freely as if he had not raised a hand, and hand and foot kept exact time with his will; but Boynton was too fat to stand a long test. He fought like an amateur, a terrible amateur, to be sure, but nevertheless wearing himself out with the tensing and effort of each rush. He used himself as a battery uses its shells on a machine gun nest, feeling for the range, and confident that one well-placed hit will demolish the objective. Out of the tangle of overturned chairs and twisting bodies he whirled on Jack for the fourth time and came gibbering with noiseless rage. At full arm distance a volley of slashing blows met him; he shook them off with a toss of his great head, and bored in for the finishing hold, but his arms closed on empty air. Jack was away, and as the giant lumbered about with a snarl he met that perfectly timed one-two punch on the side of his face. It made him gasp, as though he had been struck violently in the body, and in his pain he smashed back without setting himself. For the first time his fist went home. His weight was not behind it, but like the flip of a mill-wheel in a swift race the blow, catching Jack squarely on the chest, shot him backward, staggered him, and he fell to one knee.

A pain flamed from his chest to his throat and down again; if that blow had gone home on a vital spot he knew it would have been the end of the fight; as it was, he was floored, but not stunned, yet in the very act of rising he saw Boynton run close and one of those heavy-shod feet was aimed at his head. He winced to one side with instinctive speed and the shoe brushed past his temple.

"Dirty work!" cried Jack, and leaped to

his feet. "Dirty work!" he repeated, and glared-around him. But the spectators were perfectly unconscious of anything unusual, and even Mary Dover, in the corner, stood with her chin on her hands, her great, dark eyes wide, fascinated, but not at all horrified. Boynton swung about with a grunt and flailed away with both hands. He missed, for Jack no longer attempted to block a punch. He dodged inside the sway of those burly arms and snapped his own fists into the face of the giant—a blue lump puffed out under one of Boynton's eyes, a red gash opened on his upper lip and, whining with inarticulate frenzy, he came again, and again his rush went wide and the hard fists of Jack clicked home.

They circled here and there about the room, they knocked over men and chairs and the iron-legged tables, and always Jack was hair's-breadth away from the terrible blows of the bouncer, and always his own counters cracked like the spat of an open palm against Boynton's face. The latter was being cut to ribbons.

One eye was closed long since; his mouth puffed out and became a shapeless red mark; blood spattered his shirt. And yet he came in, looking for an opening, clawing for a grip on Jack. His wind grew shorter, his breath was a gasp and rattle, and his one open eye was bursting from his head with the frantic efforts. He still had an enormous reserve of muscular and nerve energy, but to Jack it looked as though the enemy were toppling to defeat.

He determined to make a final and quick bid for the victory. His own arms were numb and weary, and he could not give a decisive blow while he was leaping about never planted for the punch, so he decided to stand with his back to the wall and venture to meet one of those rushes without flinching, confident now that he could stop the uncertain Boynton with straight blows.

He emerged from a clash in the middle of the floor with his hands dripping red and slipped over to the corner; Boynton came thundering after, breathing through his teeth rather than through his bleeding lips. Poised, leaning slightly forward, Jack waited for the critical instant, and when Boynton ran into range he surged out and

planted both fists in that horrible face. The great body wavered; he struck again, one-two, and the giant sagged; again he struck, and this time the huge man toppled, but he fell, not back, and one of his clawing hands fastened on the neck of Jack.

The moment its grip sunk into his flesh Jack knew that the bouncer was far from spent; it literally cut into him; it crushed muscles, it threatened to snap the bones of the vertebræ. The companion of that arm whipped about him; the weight of a mountain crushed him toward the floor. Once down, he knew that the end was come, and only chance saved him.

In falling, his shoulder struck the wall, and the impact turned them over. Down they came with Jack on top, and doubling up his legs, when they hit the floor his knees sank into the stomach of the bouncer. He thrust away with all his might; the arm about his back held, but the hand on his throat slipped—it was wet with sweat, blood, perhaps—slipped away little by little. It seared the flesh like five points of red-hot iron, but still it came away, it was gone, and the fresh air rushed like a cool blessing down his throat and gave him life.

With one arm he fended away that frantic, reaching hand as it strove for a second grip; the other fist he smashed again, again, and again into the face of the fallen man until the arm about his back loosed its grip—he was able to tear himself away and stagger back.

After him came Boynton like the metal after the magnet. He was unrecognizable now and more terrible for that reason; no battering or blood-letting, it seemed, could beat him down; and if he gained again a grip one tithe as good as the one from which Jack had just escaped by chance there would be a grim period to this battle. But as he rushed, the swing of Boynton's hand knocked a heavy siphon of seltzer from a table-top. He checked himself as it rolled at his feet, and then with a moan of joy scooped it up and hurled it straight at the head of Jack.

Ordinarily he could have dodged it easily, but he was frozen with astonishment. He knew the meaning of it the moment the fellow stooped, but he could not believe,

for this was his country, where men fought cleanly. He sidestepped, indeed, automatically, but the siphon clipped him on the corner of the forehead and dropped him stunned beside the wall.

All the grinning, delighted faces around the tables blurred before him; behind the counter he was vaguely aware of Mary Dover running out—to stop the fight. Then a stabbing pain in his forehead cleared his senses with magic speed. It had all happened in the split part of a second, and there was Larry Boynton gathering himself to rush at a helpless prey. And down his face went a warm trickle; very warm, slow-running; it crossed his lips, it touched his tongue, it was salt to the taste. Blood! His own blood!

What happened then in Jack Lodge was something he could never understand, but it was like the snapping of an invisible thread which had tied him, the lifting of a weight which had crushed him. He felt only one thing, that the battle was glorious and that he would kill Larry Boynton; he saw only one thing, the bull throat of the bouncer. And he came off the floor like a tight spring uncoiling and went straight at that throat. He saw a flash of horror in the face of Boynton, who checked himself in the midst of his rush and gave back so that Jack missed his leap and fell, sprawling.

He was up in an instant. An enormous strength flowed hot through his veins, tingled in his finger-tips. He wanted to fasten them—in that burly throat—and find the life. Horror? Yes, it was there, staring in the face of Boynton. Why? For his part, he was happy, he rejoiced, he could have sung, but the singing only came as far as his clenched teeth and issued as a moan.

"Help!" cried Boynton. "He ain't human. He's a tiger!"

He struck blindly, desperately at Jack. "Help!" he screamed. "A tiger! A devil!"

The hand of Jack fell on his shoulder; he wrenched himself away and half his shirt ripped to the waist.

"Damn you!" moaned Jack. "Fight!"

For Boynton had leaped back into the

crowd of the spectators. There in the corner stood Mary Dover; she seemed suddenly to be the prize of all this struggle. He leaped straight for that disfigured, panic-stricken face. It faded away; a host of warding arms reached between to keep him from his prey; some one heaved up a chair.

"All of you, then!" gasped Jack. His hand fell on the iron leg of an upturned table; he swept it up and flung the table into the faces of the crowd; he rushed on, caught up a chair, whirled it about his head.

It fell with a crash; there was a scream. Three faces rose between him and the retreating back of Larry Boynton. He struck three times, driving his fists through a tumult of flailing arms and the three faces disappeared. But others flocked about him, in front, from the sides, even in the rear they came. Yet they found no solid lodgment for their blows, for he fought like a wolf, never still for an instant, but leaping, swerving, slashing with his hands. Again, again, again he felt stinging blows, but they were merely spurs which pricked him on; and always there was that great rejoicing in him, swelling his heart. He fought, shouting; he called to them to stay.

And then a sudden panic took them. They had been cursing him, struggling to get at him with an earnestness that tangled them in knots, but now there was only a yelling for more room. The doors jammed with the outward rush; a window was smashed and the fugitives tumbled through it. He caught up another chair and used it like a flail.

Suddenly he was alone. A remnant of shattered wood was in his hand; the singing bubbled up to his lips and came out in a wild laughter, a voice he did not recognize as his own. Then he saw the white face of Sanford, staring from the shadow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADOPTION.

"TIGER," said a voice near him, and he turned upon Mary Dover. She came straight upon him, with her face so lighted that she seemed on the verge of laughter.

"Tiger," she said, "you're some mixer, put 'er here!"

He took her hand in a bloody paw; she was smiling with an admiration as open as the day.

"Come over here," she directed. "Sit down. Now don't move till I come back."

She disappeared through the door, and Sanford came to the side of his master.

"Now's your chance," he whispered.

"Chance for what?"

"To go."

"Go where?"

"Out of here. Listen, they'll knife you!"

"Rot. They've had enough."

"The girl's gone. Where? Maybe to get her gang."

"Sanford, you're a croaker. Besides, I've a reason for staying."

"What?"

"A lady asked me to."

"I'll give you a better one for *leaving*."

"Well?"

"Look at yourself in that mirror."

He stood up, obediently, and in the glass behind the mirror arose a terrible face, with a great smear of red down the side of it, and dabs of crimson elsewhere like war-paint on an Indian. He stood fascinated.

"Your father wouldn't know you!"

"Thank God!" said Jack. "Thank God for that!"

And through the door came Mary Dover with a basin of hot, steaming water under one arm and several small packages in the other hand. The cook and two waiters sidled in the room behind her, stole cautiously past Jack, and set about straightening the furniture. As for the girl, she thrust the water into the hands of Sanford, and started to clear the face of the master from its blood.

"I've seen Craigie, and Johnston the Bull," she said, dexterously swabbing his forehead without hurting the cut place at one side. "And I've seen the Chicago Rambler at his best, mixing it, but never a one to touch you, Tiger. Never a one!"

"Ouch!" cried Jack. "What the deuce is that?"

She had applied something pungent in smell to his forehead.

"This will clean the cut. Hold still!"

Craigie was bubbles when it came to foot-work, and Johnston had a straight left that was a dream. Man, I can see him stabbing with it! And the Rambler was a cyclone at close quarters, and the in stuff."

She stood off and looked squarely at him.

"But when I saw you going I said to myself at first: 'He's fast on his feet and he's got a pretty left, but where's his punch?' And what's pretty boxing without a wallop? Eggs without salt! But then Larry rapped you with the bottle and you woke up!"

She turned reverent eyes upward.

"Then I knew you'd been playing with him all the time. And when he flagged it, Tiger, I knew you were the best little mixer that ever stepped into the Chuck-a-Luck! And that's saying something, I'll tell the staring world!"

She caught him by the shoulders and pushed him back into the chair.

"Lay back. Take it easy. They nicked you some beauties, and you'll have black and blue spots if I don't get 'em away!"

She wrung out a towel in the hot water and laid it across his face. It made him dumb, but she kept on talking.

"Let yourself go. Rest up. You may have another mix before you get out of this, and you'll have to be in shape. But where do you get the punch out of those shoulders?" A hand ran down his arm. "A nice arm, Tiger, but that's not where you get it." Then the finger-tips ran expertly across the back of his shoulders. "Ah, there's where it is! The back's what does it every time!"

She drew away the hot towel.

"Mary," he said, "you're better than a barber."

"A thousand ways, but I'm not through." And she placed a strip of plaster accurately across the cut temple. "You won't show a mark," she nodded, with wonder. "Not a mark—after all that! Well, that's where the footwork came in."

For a moment their eyes met; he saw hers widen; he felt that he was looking deeply into them; and suddenly they narrowed again and she stepped back with something of a sigh.

There had been a sort of motherly ten-

derness about her while she worked over him, but the single step back carried her far away from him; her voice had been as soft as the touch of her hands, but now it was hard again, careless. She squinted critically at him.

"On your way, pal, and beat it back to your folks."

"My folks?" he echoed.

She grinned broadly at him, and took the basin of water from Sanford and laid it on the counter.

"Do you still make out that you're one of us?"

"Why not?"

"Keep cool. I'm not hunting for trouble, but don't try to hand me a bluff." She laughed in his face. "Listen, Mr. Elbow, because your pal slips me the high-sign, do you think that's enough to make me fall for your game? As a scrapper you're all there, but as a flatty, Tiger, you leave a lot of room for suggestions."

She paused and smiled calmly upon him.

"You mean that I and my friend," said Jack, conning over what little slang he had heard from Sanford on the way down to the Tangle, "are detectives?"

"You are," nodded the girl—"at least, you're not one of us. As for your pal—" She left her chair and walked calmly across the room and stood close to Sanford. Something about his face, apparently, suddenly excited her. "I don't know," she murmured, keeping her face toward the valet while she backed up to her former position. "I don't know. Your pal *might* belong down in the Tangle. But what I know is that *you* don't. We're not your people, Mr. Dick, so whatever your game is, it's blown. Beat it. Beat it before they come back."

Sanford obediently started toward the door, but Jack halted him with a gesture. "We are staying here," he announced. To Mary Dover: "This is a rooming house, isn't it?"

"Not one that would interest you," she said.

"On the contrary, I think I'll find a room very much to my liking."

"This isn't a bluff any more," said the

girl coldly. "It's a freeze. We don't want your trade, Mr. Peeler. Are you looking for information about the Tangle? Do you want to get it at the Chuck-a-Luck? I'll tell you what you'll find out; and every bull in the force must know it. Down here we have boys of all kinds, and most of them are straight.

"Besides the straight ones there may be a few penny-weighters, and heels, and scratchers, and barons, and harmless gents like those; but even they are trying to go straight, mostly. It's fellows like you, who sneak in among 'em in a ring-up like a hook and then hound 'em until you get 'em started down-hill again."

She grew furious as she talked and stood very straight before Jack. "Do you think I'd let a flatty like you take a room here? I tell you straight, I'm on to you! You're a fast mixer and you're game, but I don't like your kind."

"And what makes you so certain that I'm a detective, eh?"

"I tell a man by the inside of his hands," said the girl instantly, "and I saw the inside of yours when you came by the counter. Look at them!" She caught his hand and held it palm up. "Work? I should say not! Look at the lines; look at the nails; look at the way the nails trim down to the ends. Bah!"

She tossed his hand away and laughed.

"Is that enough to prove that I'm a flatty?"

"It's enough to prove that you're not one of us. You don't work; you say you aren't a flatty. What are you? What brings you down here?"

"Perhaps because I like the people."

She laughed. In repose there might be other girls more beautiful than Mary Dover, but when she laughed she stood alone. The sound of her voice, somehow, completed her.

Jack sent a look of appeal toward Sanford, for the latter had at least a vocabulary which might convince this girl, but Sanford remained exasperatingly obtuse and persisted in looking in the opposite direction.

"You liked the reception the boys gave you, Tiger," she was saying.

"You can have my word for it," he said suddenly. "I'm not an officer."

"Your word?" she repeated, starting to laugh again. But as he leaned forward in his chair she grew sober and started at him. "Your word!" said Mary Dover in such a voice as if she had never heard a man's honor appealed to before. "What are you?" she asked. Her voice grew sharp. "What do you want?"

"I'm one of your people," he said simply, "and I want to be accepted as such."

"What makes you one of us?"

"By adoption."

"Did the boys adopt you by slugging you with a bottle?"

"No, but I adopted them."

"What's your game?"

"Don't you see, Mary Dover? I like you; I want to be one of you. Try me, and you'll see that I can be trusted."

And the girl studied him with her great bright eyes as if she were reading print in an unknown language. She had seen the work of his hands, and in his face she read possibilities of danger. Yet she was fascinated.

"Don't you see," she explained, "that if you stay down here you'll be bumped off in about two days? The boys are off you. You aren't one of them, and you've stepped on a good many toes all in one afternoon."

He only smiled.

"Well," said Mary Dover, "I like you. You're different, but I think you're straight. Shake again!" And even while his hand closed over hers she grew serious again, and her face hardened amazingly. "I'm for you, Tiger, and I'm going to give you a room here in the Chuck-a-Luck, but the first move you make that's shady—" and she made a significant pause.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIGER GETS A JOB.

IT was that pause and the hardening of her eyes more than anything he had seen that day that made Jack realize how and why she handled the men of the

Tangle. She turned on her heel without another word and led the way into the hall and up the stairs.

"One room or two?" she queried.

"Two," said Jack.

She was on a landing when he replied, and at the answer she turned a little and flashed a quizzical glance at the pair.

"Thirty-five, forty-two, or sixty-five per?" she asked again.

"Sixty-five," answered Jack.

And once again she looked back at them and smiled to herself. But she said nothing, having long ago formed the habit of doing most of her thinking in silence, which is strengthening for the mind, particularly of a woman. She showed them into two rooms on the southeast corner, each with a pair of large windows apiece; there she unlocked the door between, throwing the two rooms together.

She explained the apartment in three words, accompanied by appropriate gestures to two doors and to a window opening on the fire-escape: "Kitchenette, bath, exit."

She turned to Jack, automatically accepting him as the leader. "Anything wanted?"

"One thing more. There was some furniture broken while we were exercising down-stairs. What's it worth?"

"Not half as much as I'll make on the gents who drop in to see where you and Larry fought. I'll keep the chair you used in a corner. They'll all want to handle it."

She smiled again. "All that I've lost is the best bouncer in the Tangle."

"You mean, Boynton won't stay?"

"In a place where he was licked?" She chuckled.

"Among other things," he said, "I need a job. How about me in Larry's place?"

"You?" she queried, wide-eyed. Then she cast another appreciative glance over him. "Tiger," she said, "with you as bouncer I'd have the quietest place in the Tangle. But it can't be done."

"Why not?"

"I can't make your price."

"What you paid Larry."

"Twenty-five a week?"

"It's more," said Jack truthfully, "than I've ever worked for before."

She glanced at him strangely, and then nodded. "I'll take you." And she repeated to herself: "Twenty-five a week; and sixty-five a month for his rooms." She added aloud: "Nothing doing until evening. You can take it easy till then, Tiger. S'long!"

And she was gone through the door. The moment she was gone Sanford rose from his chair and stood respectfully, awaiting orders. His master observed and grinned broadly.

"Sit down!" he ordered. Then: "Sanford, you've been my valet for a good many years, and you've also been my friend."

"Yes, sir."

"But while we're down here you cease to be my valet, even when people aren't looking; you remain only my friend."

"Sir?"

"And no more of this 'sir.' And to begin as my friend, I want you to know a secret. You saw the girl who just left the room?"

"I did."

"You noted her particularly?"

"Yes."

"Don't forget her, Sanford. She's the future Mrs. Jack Lodge."

The valet rose from his chair slowly until he was almost erect, and then collapsed.

"Good God!" he gasped.

"Shocked?"

"Your father—your mother—" stammered Sanford.

"They've been hounding me toward a marriage, Sanford, and I'm taking their advice." He lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "I tell you now so that you'll understand later on. This is going to make trouble. It means a fight, first to win her, and afterward to win over opinion. But damn opinion!"

"However," murmured Sanford, "if a girl is not—"

"Well?"

"There is a question of caste, you know."

"There are only two castes of women,

Sanford: those who are ladies and those who are not. And she is a lady. How do I know? By her eyes. I knew it the moment I met her glance over the mob when she was getting the mob under her thumb; there's metal in her, and there's a spark that's set me on fire!" He repeated in a voice that made Sanford's heart come into his throat. "On fire!"

He stood up and held out a hand. "Do you see a change, Sanford?"

"I do."

"Why, man, I'm so changed that I like the city for the first time in my life. I even like the Tangle. Can you believe it?"

He stepped to the window and threw it open, and leaned out over the confusion of the street.

"Under their dirty shirts, Sanford, I'll wager that these crooks and laborers are as much men as any, eh? And I'd as soon make a place among them."

"It seems to me," said the valet, "that your place is already made."

"How is that?"

"You see that group gathering across the street?"

"The fellow in the blue shirt, and the rat-faced man, and the rest of 'em?"

"Yes, and there comes some more."

"You notice they are all looking up to this window?"

"What of that?"

"You're known, sir."

"Impossible, in this space of time."

"Not at all; news travels by wireless down in the Tangle. It runs through the air and through the ground. Amazing what space a whisper will cover."

"By the Lord, Sanford, they're all looking up here, that's a fact!"

"And they're talking about the Tiger!"

Jack turned away from the window.

"How the devil do you know that?" he asked.

"By reading their lips, sir."

"You a lip-reader? I've never heard you speak of it before."

The valet flushed a little. "It's something that I picked up at odd moments a long time ago, sir."

The other shot a sudden glance at his

servant, but it was never possible to catch the fellow off guard. He was as steady under the glance of Jack Lodge as though he had met the casual eye of a boy of ten.

"Let it go," said Jack; "but it seems to me that you have a good many hidden accomplishments, Sanford."

He turned again, and then stepped back out of view from the street, for the group opposite was growing apace.

In fact, that wireless of rumor concerning which Sanford had spoken was busily at work in the Tangle. After the first rush of frightened men from the Chuck-a-Luck melted away into the crowds outside, each of them, too ashamed of what he had done and the manner of his flight, to talk about what he had seen in the old barroom, a murmur began somewhere and spread like the ripple around the pebble that is dropped in the pool; except that there was no single place where it started. It gathered in phrases:

"A fight in the Chuck-a-Luck; did you see Larry Boynton's face covered with blood?" "A new guy did it; they call him the Tiger." "A new guy ran wild in the Chuck-a-Luck and cleaned up Larry Boynton." And finally the whisper took this definite form: "The Tiger is in the Chuck-a-Luck, and he's cleaned up Larry Boynton, easy."

Now, Larry Boynton was a name to conjure with through all the Tangle. There were a vast number of the men who had felt the fists of Larry; and most of the women had seen the bruises he made. And here was a new man, known by the sinister title of "the Tiger," who could handle Boynton with apparent ease!

That definite whisper finally began and spread swiftly. A newsboy told it to the ashman directly under Mrs. Larrago's window, where Mrs. Larrago sat peeling potatoes; and by the simple expedient of leaning out the window and calling, "Irene, have you heard the news?" she brought not only the neighbor above her to the window to listen, but all others within the sound of her powerful voice. They heard; in five minutes the tidings ran through that tenement.

A customer told it to the tailor, who passed it back to his apprentice, who shot it with a purple border of additions into the cleaning-and-pressing room, from where it gravitated naturally down to a basement and thrilled the ears of the janitor, who passed it on to the sub-basement, where an old Chinaman sat cross-legged on a mat before a wall where there was no apparent opening.

Yet through that wall the news traveled soon in a bubbling guttural, and reached the opium smokers within, far down, four levels below the street, and came boiling up again on the other side, three blocks away, in the form of a "hop-head" currying favor with a policeman by retailing the latest news of the Tangle.

Within an astonishingly few minutes the tidings of the Tiger had spread like oil on water, or fire on oil, through the noisy streets of the slums, and down to the deepest subcellar, and up to the top of the highest tenement. There was a new power in the Tangle, and his name was the Tiger.

CHAPTER XI.

WHITEY.

TO the initiated there were many ways of entering and leaving the Chuck-a-Luck building. One might drift into it from an adjacent roof, and even swing skilfully from a neighboring window; and there were passages which wound into its cellars and stairways which climbed obscurely from the top to the bottom. It was the cellar route which Boynton chose when he started back toward his old happy hunting-grounds.

He only waited until his face had been swabbed off with medicated stuff by a henchman, the cuts covered with plaster, and the bruises disguised as far as possible with powder, and then started back through the subterranean passages, for these were the safest. By this it must not be understood that Larry was afraid of meeting Jack Lodge because of physical danger to himself.

He had been beaten fairly and squarely

in a fist-fight, but in one art Larry was far more dexterous than in boxing, and that was in the mystery of conjuring guns out of apparently flat pockets and ringing the bull's-eye with every snap shot he fired. He had one of these flat guns with him now; the weight of it dragged a little at his shoulder, while the muzzle tapped against his ribs. He could produce it from its concealment in three ways, and each of those gestures were too fast for any but a camera eye to follow. Yet the very weight of his gun was what made him skulk back to the Chuck-a-Luck through the cellars, because he knew that if he saw the Tiger he would shoot the fellow full of holes on sight.

In spite of all that has been written about the "bad men" of the Tangle and their slaughterings right and left when they run amuck, it is not true that even the worst of them pride themselves on their record as man-killers, as some of the Western fighters did a generation ago. Murder in the twentieth century has become a luxury on which society puts a heart-breaking tax.

Larry Boynton was really "bad"; even in the Tangle he was known for a temper which discharged into fury at the least hair-trigger pressure, and now he yearned mightily to face the stranger and turn loose his automatic. But he remembered always that a blood-trail is generally an easy trail to follow; as far as he knew, there was only one man in the Tangle who killed frequently and with impunity, and that was the half-legendary figure of the Baboon; so Larry fought back his impulses and took that subcellar route. It brought him quickly enough to the top-story of the Chuck-a-Luck, and he tapped on a door which opened and showed the bald head and the young face of Lew McGuire.

The latter felt a great impulse to break into laughter when he saw the battered countenance of the ex-bouncer, but very wisely he restrained the motion and asked Larry in with a gesture.

Larry had noted that twinkle, and he stared at Lew with a savage hope that the smile might become tangible, and an ex-

cuse for action, but McGuire made his face a mask.

"You want to see Whitey?" he murmured.

"Quick!

"This ain't his time for seein' guys," said Lew. "You know he ain't got much strength, poor old Whitey!"

"Look here," said Larry sternly, "I'm on the inside. Whitey knows me."

He waited, but Lew only answered:

"Sure he does, but it's got to be pretty important before I can break in on the old man; mostly he don't even let *me* come in during his off hours."

"Him lying in bed flat on his back all day," said Larry scornfully, "how does he keep you out?"

"He's got a string fixed close to the head of his bed; he can throw the latch on and off with a pull at that."

"Give him the signal, anyway."

Lew hesitated a moment longer and then tapped at the inner door, twice, in quick succession; then an interval, and then three quick raps again.

"That's your name," he grinned at Larry.

There was silence in the room.

"Hell!" grunted Larry Boynton. "Try again."

"Wait a minute. He's thinkin' it over, maybe."

And almost at once there was a single faint knock from within, and the click of the lock.

"You're in luck," nodded Lew, and opened the door.

It showed the plain bedroom of the paralytic philanthropist of the Chuck-a-Luck; for hardly three weeks had he been here, but already he was a power in the Tangle and known far and wide for his good works. His paralysis was a singular affection. All the lower part of his body was powerless, but from the waist up he had perfect freedom of movement and excellent control except for the speaking muscles of the throat. These were so completely gone that he had never been known to utter any other sound than a sigh during all his stay at the Chuck-a-Luck.

His means of communication were his

hands, which, perhaps because of the steady exercise he had to give them, looked as supple as those of a young man, and with his fingers he talked the deaf and dumb language with amazing fluency. His arms, too, as is frequently the case with cripples who have no other means of locomotion, were long and strong. In general it was understood that the paralysis was creeping up from the hips of the unfortunate man and would, in a matter of weeks, strike the vital organs.

Which made his charities still more to be wondered at. He financed the soup-kitchen with which Mary Dover served the "broke"; his influence ran abroad. Through Lew McGuire, his body-servant and the translator of his sign-language, and through other agents, he kept himself informed of the most pressing cases of need in the Tangle, and distributed his charity wisely and liberally.

Many a cold eye in the slums grew moist, for instance, when they heard how the paralytic who lay mute in his room had reached a hand to poor Sally Vane, a consumptive, and sent her clear to Arizona to give her a fighting chance for life. Indeed, there were a few cynics who said that the old fellow was trying to make amends for a long life of evil by spending his last moments and his ill-gotten money to serve in a few good acts before his death; but these cynics dared not more than whisper their opinions.

The Tangle in one accord held its breath when it heard the recital of the dying man's good deeds; it was even said that this mute example of virtue out-facing death had been in itself enough to lift up Garry Fitzpatrick and send him straight. And it was certain that at least half a dozen of the most notorious crooks in the Tangle came surreptitiously to visit Old Whitey.

Rumor had it—though this was not generally believed—that even that incarnate lord of evil, the Baboon himself, had sometimes come and bowed his head at the bedside of the sick man.

All these things went through the mind of Larry Boynton and made his step soft as he crossed the threshold; yet he had,

also, the manner of one coming to demand his dues. Old Whitey got his name from the flood of white beard which began at the cheek-bones and swept down across his chest, rippling and thin. He was not bald, the hair being as thick as that of a young man, but it was as snowy white as the beard was silver; and his eyebrows also were long white tufts which when lowered almost completely veiled the eyes.

He had been playing solitaire, his only amusement, and now he folded his hands. Nothing lived about him except his glittering, black eyes, and these shone the more clearly in spite of the fact that Whitey was averse to much light and habitually kept his room in a state of semi-shadow. The window was so shaded that the sun fell brightly only on the chair where his visitors sat, and all of Whitey's bed was left in gloom out of which his keen eyes sparkled.

"Whitey," said Larry Boynton, "look me over! I ain't pretty? No, I ain't. Well, I'll tell you what happened. A new guy blew in to the soup-line to-day and started getting fresh. Mary asked me to throw him out; I started to do it. Had him on the way to the door when we tripped up and fell, and when I come down my chin hit the Tiger's knee. After that I was dazed and I couldn't even think. He done this to me while I was helpless. Lew, is that straight?"

He glared at McGuire, and the latter slowly nodded his head.

"Now, when I beat it, Mary Dover double-crosses me and gives my job to this new guy. What is he? He's a ringer for a dip or a heel, I don't know which. Got hands as soft as a girl's and no sign of work about him. What I say is this: Are guys like that goin' to break in on the Chuck-a-Luck, or are they not? They are not! Well, who's running the Chuck-a-Luck? Whitey is! Whitey, I ask you, do I get my job back or don't I?"

He stopped, puffing with his oration and with his anger. Those keen eyes which had never left the face of Boynton were veiling by a lowering both of the brows and the eyelids.

Then the limp right hand raised from

the cover of his bed and the fingers glided through half a dozen characters.

"Describe him," translated Lew McGuire.

"About six feet two," said Larry, "and kind of slender-lookin', but a hell of a lot bigger than he looks. Grayish hair around the temples, and oldish face, but damned young eyes. Big hands. That sounds like a regular, but he's a lounge lizard, or else I'm a flogger-stiff! He's got that way with girls, Whitey. And what's brought him to the Chuck-a-Luck? Mary brought him. He's got his eyes on her!"

The invalid started so violently that it seemed that even the stiff feet stirred under the bedding. The bush of brows lifted, and the black eyes flared out at Larry Boynton.

The latter saw he had scored his first blow and followed his hit instantly. "And he's gettin' what he wants," he went on. "Ain't she given him my job already?"

But the eyes of the sick man were veiled once more. There followed a moment of waiting in which Larry Boynton grew green with impatience. He lowered his voice to a half-whine:

"You know what brought me here, Whitey. You know you had Lew tip me off that you'd get me the bouncer job, so's I'd be close to Mary, and you'd use your pull with her for me. Maybe you been tryin' to pull me straight, and I've been workin' to keep straight. You know that. But if Mary hands me the icy mitt—"

Lew McGuire caught the eye of Larry and silenced him with a frantic gesture. "He's thinkin'," he said. "He don't hear nothin' you're talkin' about."

Larry Boynton grew red and then ground his teeth in resignation. Presently the eyes of the paralytic opened slowly, and the agile fingers of his right hand began to move through the symbols of the dumb speech. They did not seem the fingers of an old man, so easily and strongly they worked, and sometimes it seemed as if that hand were detached from the body; the body was crumbling with years—the hand was that of a powerful youth. Lew McGuire followed the movements with his bright eyes.

"What's the name of the stranger?" he spelled, syllable by syllable.

"Jack. They call him the Tiger now."

Once more the hand of Whitey framed the swift characters with fluid movements of his fingers.

"Tiger shall leave the Chuck-a-Luck," translated Lew McGuire.

"Whitey," cried Larry, "you *are* white, by God! And I'll tell you why I want him gone, mostly: because if I come across him again I'll croak the moll buzzer for fair! Whitey, I know you can do what you want with Mary, and now I want to say—"

But Lew McGuire cut in upon his speech curtly. The hand of the invalid had made a single gesture.

"Tired!" said Lew. "Larry, that's your high sign to be on your way. Whitey 'll take care of you."

The ex-bouncer grinned and vanished through the door. Whitey in the mean time lay with his eyes closed again, as was his habit when he thought deeply. Then his hand moved again, and McGuire, as was his habit, rendered the words aloud: "Is Tiger here because of Mary?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

"I watched him," answered Lew. "He looked at her like a penny-weighter at a diamond front. He's a flash, chief. He don't belong. Handy with his fists—my God, *ain't* he!—but as Mary says: 'The inside of his hand is too soft!' But he's the kind a straight girl like Mary might fall for."

The swift fingers slid into knots that unraveled, formed again, fell apart, and they said:

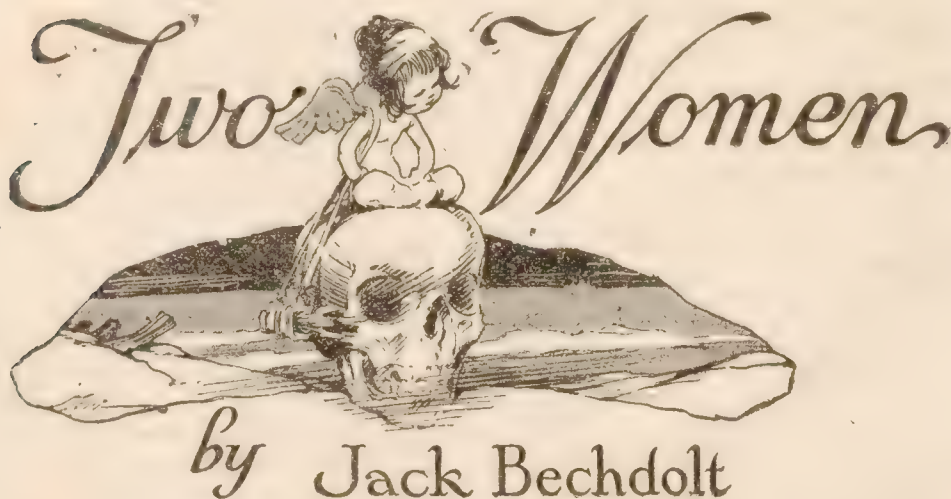
"For the sake of Mary he must be sent away. Bring Mary to me."

Lew had turned away when a single knock of the paralytic's right knuckles against the wall called him back. "Before you go to Mary, find Hal Loomis and Sloan, and tell them to start down the trail of Tiger. I must know all about him."

Lew McGuire nodded and hurried through the door.

"If old Whitey had his legs workin', what a man he'd be—what a *man*! The Tiger may be fast, but that old white-head lyin' there will tie him up like a cat."

So pondered Lew McGuire and grinned to himself.



THE beach shelved steeply, but the surf was light because of a small island, not much more than a reef, a short distance off-shore which broke the rollers. In color the sand was a dirty yel-

low, marred by outcroppings of shale and patches of blue clay. At high-tide mark there was a boundary line between sea and land—a carefully marked-out barrier of fantastically heaped flotsam gathered from

the four corners of the earth, destined to embroider the loneliness of a forsaken shore in a God-forgotten land.

Lengths of kelp, some of them ten and twelve feet, their bulbous roots like the heads of great serpents twined with the raffie of various sea weeds. And there were husks of coconut which must have washed thousands of miles; sometimes a sodden piece of grass matting or one of those cleverly-made bamboo kegs from Japan. Despised by the sea, rejected by the land, the weird refuse was a constant reminder of the world of men that served to make the loneliness unforgettable.

The wooded shore that rose steeply behind the beach was a black green and above its straggling forest of fir rose vast, black mountains shouldering up stark naked into the cold blue, their sides marred and scarred by rain, snow and ice—the tools of the Great Sculptor.

The effect of this land was like a heavy weight on the slender shoulders of Alice Reyd. It seemed to break her spirit. It made her walk fearfully, with apprehensive looks.

She was a slight young woman, inclined to blond in type and with blue eyes. If there was character in her face it was rather concealed by prettiness though she had a noticeably good chin.

More incongruous than any of the strange flotsam about her was her clothing. The short "sport" skirt was a gay plaid, smartly cut and badly wrinkled; her boots were much too light for the country, fit rather for a golf course. A silken shirtwaist was badly mussed and over that was a light sweater of gay green silk, as futile in that land as a new born kitten against the wolf pack.

She walked with a slight limp, on her face a look of frightened expectation as if any second might reveal some new unpleasantness.

She picked her halting steps among the tangled weeds and drift, avoiding the great heaped up barriers of dead timbers, an incongruous, lonely little figure in draggled smartness lost in a nightmare of naked wilderness.

What she was thinking about as she

walked was as fantastic as her clothes. A glance at the platinum cased little watch on her wrist had shown that it was a quarter after four o'clock. She remembered that at just this moment, thousands of miles away, Winter, a white-haired servant was wheeling a rubber-tired tea-wagon into her pleasant drawing-room. The room would be thoughtfully dimmed against the warm fall sunlight, neither too warm nor too cold. Her aunt would be there, rather stately in a dark maroon silk of a Colonial quaintness, possibly her uncle as well and perhaps a half dozen friends who often stopped in at this hour. In the Avenue outside the motors would be passing in constant stream, quiet, shining and sleek. Across the way the Park was lovely now. There would be no dirt, no discord, no danger there, only the familiar dear presence of old friends and kin and the ordered peace of good housekeeping.

She stood perfectly still, pressing two small fists against her eyes and tears began to slip down her cheeks.

In the first flush of this nostalgia Alice Reyd could easily have given up to despair. Her knees were weak, something like nausea made her tremble all over and the hot tears flowed in defiance of her will. Then a little thing ended the incident by substituting terror for self-pity.

Wiping viciously at her tears she shook her head and opened her eyes. And near her feet she saw what made her gasp and turn away and finally almost run back to the three who shared her fortunes in a strange adventure. And as she ran she looked back fearfully, afraid to see, yet unable to forget the flotsam that lay along the shore.

The thing was only a drowned mattress, such a narrow sack as is used in the berths of a cruising launch. It lay sodden where the tide had dropped it, inoffensive and rather pathetic in its incongruity.

But it reminded Alice Reyd that somewhere out there in that channel lay the wreck of the cruising launch Fox, somewhere down deep among rocks and mud where there was an eternal twilight of green water and snaky kelp and fish and crab that never saw the day. And somewhere,

too, washed the body of Marie, her maid, the one casualty of their wrecking.

II.

THE other three were busy about their camp. Alice heard their voices long before she saw them and particularly she heard the hearty voice of her sister, Joan, singing a swaggering, cheerfully impudent ballad of vagabondia.

Joan was first to discover her sister and as she dragged the heavy limb of a broken tree toward their fire she called, "Lo, Al, find a box we can use?"

Alice hung her head. "Joan I—forgot—all about it—"

"All right, old girl. Got something anyhow." Joan swaggered on toward the fire, the clumsy log bumping behind her.

Joan Reyd stood easily five feet eight when she was not wearing the heavy mountain boots that clothed her legs almost knee high. Her skin was browned by sun, her hair was a dark brown and her eyes were brown and lively with a glinting light. She stood very straight and walked with a little swagger. Just now she wore a man's flannel shirt, a short and serviceable skirt and a man's hat of tweed cloth. There was red in her brown cheeks and a tempting red in her lips. She was used to having her own way and managing the affairs of her sister. That she was directly responsible for their being cast away in a desolate place, with the memory of some very nasty perils but a little way behind and prospect of more to come, did not seem to disturb her at all.

Phineas Reyd had left his two daughters very well established in life by the income from property scattered pretty well about the world. The copper mine at Katmak, Alaska, was but one item. Alice would have been content all her days to take these things for granted and enjoy what fortunes came to her. It was Joan who was set on challenging life.

When letters came from Ed Streeter, superintendent of their copper property at Katmak, suggesting the profits in developing another ledge Phineas Reyd once had bought for a ridiculous sum, Joan jumped at the chance of visiting a strange land.

Alice, who had hoped for a quiet summer at Bar Harbor found her plans destined for change. There had been lengthy telegraphic negotiations, then a trip by rail across the continent to Vancouver, B. C., where the chartered yacht Haida awaited them. After that a voyage through the Inside Passage and then the open ocean to this desolation on the western coast of Alaska. Joan had gloried in it all; Alice longed in secret for the quiet of home and shuddered whenever inadvertently she looked on the amazing bulk and sweep and grimness of this shore of stark mountains and glaciers.

At Katmak they discovered that the ledge in question was a good forty miles north and accessible only by launch. Streeter had borrowed the Fox and the companionship of John Nelson who owned the craft. The four with Alice's maid had gone adventuring into wild and treacherous channels while their yacht waited at the one available anchorage off Katmak. In thick fog the Fox had torn its keel out along a snag-toothed reef and here were these four survivors, inadequately supplied and equipped facing the prospect of a dozen forms of painful death.

Yet Joan Reyd could sing! Alice almost hated her for it.

III.

DARKNESS came like the snuffing of a candle and Alice was hysterically grateful for the roaring fire. She sat so close to it that her clothing scorched yet always beneath her shoulder blades was the chill feeling of the black woods behind like a bitter draft in a warm room. The surf washing the beach gently talked in confused voices from which one could almost catch scattered words and often the stealthy footsteps of unseen men. But the forest was silent and the silence was even more fearsome than the boisterous voices of the water.

Alice sat close beside Streeter. She had a pathetic desire to sit even closer—even to wind her arms about him and seek the protection of his body against the things she feared. Outwardly anyway he promised a very effective bulwark against most dangers.

The superintendent of the Katmak mine was a towering, block of a man, graceful in a big way in his rough, heavy clothing. His face was burned a brick red that made his light yellow eyebrows startling tufts of white and his mop of hair a cream hue. He had a jaw like a granite monument, thin, firm lips and a pugnacious nose. Alice knew he had been born in Alaska and Streeter declared he would die there and nowhere else.

Next to Streeter sat Joan. She was eating warmed tinned beans off a piece of shingle, using a clam shell for a spoon, and enjoying them. Alice choked over her own portion of the food, choked and gave up trying. She did not like beans in any form and added to that she had got sand mixed with them through her own carelessness. She felt that she never wanted to eat again.

Nelson squatted close beside Joan. His keen, lean face stared intently into the blaze and the hard muscles along his jaw bulged slightly. Nelson was dark, at first glance slender and unusually tall. But his slenderness revealed itself as hard trained muscle and his endurance was a matter of legend about Katmak. Nelson's eyes were wide set, dark and curiously soft, like a woman's eyes. The man was a strange combination of knight errant and captain of industry—a Lancelot equipped with a ledger and cash register.

According to your point of view Nelson was the patron saint and savior of the Katmak Indians, the sickly remnant of a dying people—or he was a modern Simon Legree who exploited his red wards for all the profits modern efficiency could wring from them.

He had come to Katmak fifteen years before. One of his first acts was to show the lazy tribesmen how to make money from their fish traps and their pelt hunting; to show them how the privileges of Federal protection and exemption from game restriction could bring them a profit. Among other things he had brought about the building of a small saw-mill and a school-house where—since they had no government teacher as yet—he himself taught. Nobody could deny that the Katmak tribe had profited by Nelson's teachings and

Nelson never denied that he profited with them. He intended to devote his life to them.

Joan Reyd was attracted to Nelson from the moment she met him. Alice believed that Joan loved him.

"Well, everybody, about to-morrow?"

Joan tossed her shingle plate into the flames and rising, looked down on them.

"Do we stay here to wait for the yacht, or—"

The two men exchanged a quick glance.

"What would you propose?" Nelson asked.

"Why not follow the beach—back to Katmak? Fortunately we are on the mainland; Katmak is on the mainland; all we need do is walk—"

"That's all—*walk!*" Streeter laughed unpleasantly. "Miss Reyd, if you ever tried to follow one of these beaches—"

"Why, it's not a foot more than thirty miles—"

"Yes, thirty miles—*by water.*" Nelson smiled. "If we had an airplane it would be less than that. But, Miss Reyd, a beach thirty miles, if you try to walk it, means at least a hundred in this country. Thirty miles of plain hell, if you don't mind my saying so. Thirty miles of cliffs that stick up a thousand feet, and, to my knowledge, at least two bad rivers to ford; mountains of drift-wood to cross, detours around a glacier or so; the danger of being caught by tides if you follow the sands and a leg-breaking grind up and down mountains if you don't. You may take it from me, that is *some* thirty miles."

"And if we wait here, it may be *some* wait, Nelson. You know that! It will easily be a week or ten days before they wonder where we are, then maybe a search. Well, the yacht can't come in close so that means wasting all sorts of time with the tender. If it is a systematic search—and it must be—at least a month is wasted. Meantime, what's to keep us here? One case of provisions—a week or ten days' supply—and one thatched shelter for Alice and me, thanks to you gentlemen. A very nice little shelter, but—"

"There's also the fair certainty of the yacht finding us," Streeter suggested.

"Would you call it a fair certainty? I'm not so sure! We might stay here until winter catches us, and then— No listen, boys, the thing can be done, I know. I'm not such a tenderfoot about the country. I've climbed Shasta and Hood and Rainier—yes, and I've been about in Labrador and the Maine woods. At the worst we could make it in a week or ten days, living off the country as we go. And I'd love to do it—"

"And your sister, Miss Alice?" Streeter asked.

"Oh, Al? It would be the making of her, wouldn't it, old girl?" Joan rested an affectionate hand on her sister's shoulder. Alice shook her head doubtfully.

Evidently the two men shared her doubt. Finally Nelson suggested: "I've thought of another thing. Why not let me go back to Katmak—alone? Think I could make it inside a week—and get help—"

"And maybe find the yacht had already gone," Joan objected. "There's not another boat or launch. Then what—"

"Or I could go," suggested Streeter. "Know the country pretty well—"

"No!"

It was the first time Alice had lifted her voice in their discussions. They all looked a little surprised.

"He must not go," she said fearfully. "We would be only three then. And if—if the man who stayed behind was—if anything happened again—like that thing out there, we'd be alone, two women— Don't let him go! We'll all go. If the rest of you can do it, so can I!"

"Bully for Al!" Joan slapped her sister's shoulder with delight plain on her face. "That settles it," she declared. "We start in the morning. I'm wild to do it—to see all of the country we can. It's immense, that's what I think. It—I can feel it challenges you to come and beat it. Nelson, I love this Alaska of yours—and so will you, Al, before we're through."

IV.

JOAN REYD thrived on hardship. She welcomed danger and conquered it with a laugh. The young woman was hard as

nails and fit for anything. Years of golf, of polo, of swimming and sailing and tramping and riding had tuned her for the life that began next morning. She grew radiant on it; because the most energetic and far-seeing of the quartet.

And as Joan grew radiant Alice grew sicklier. The sun did not tan her face; it burned it until the fair skin blistered. Mosquitoes and gnats tortured her. The inadequate shoes lamed her feet. Often in the morning she woke to find her fine-spun hair thick with cinder and wood-ash and when she looked at her tortured little hands she wept bitter tears at the memory of cold cream and a manicure. From the depths of experience her three companions assured her this amateur inconvenience would wear away; that some fine morning she would wake up hardened, experienced, tingling with a new life—"a real sourdough." But she knew with a shrewdness beyond their wisdom that this would never be. The wilderness was a millstone about her slender neck; a poison that tainted every breath she drew. She endured it only by hysterical counting of the days and hours between herself and all the soft, pleasant ordered ways of the civilization she longed for.

Nelson's love for Joan was patent to all; and it was plain Joan returned that affection. When Alice hinted as much Joan made a frank avowal.

"Nelson is a dear," she told her sister. "If he should ever ask me, I'd take him in a minute—"

"Joan!"

"I mean exactly that. I—he—he's the man for me, Al—the only man—"

"You mean—you would marry him?"

"I believe that is the usual proceeding," Joan smiled dryly.

"Knowing you would have to spend your life-time here—in this awful country? Joan, you know he has said he will never leave Katmak. You know he means that. He will spend his life among those Indians—"

"And so would I, if he asks me," Joan retorted proudly. "Al, my dear little Al, it's the country I love—as much as I love

Nelson. It's the life—this sort of life—dangers, adventure, roughing it. I was meant for this sort of thing, my dear—just as you were meant for the other. These last few days I've been living, Joan—*living!* Oh, it's glorious. And the other, the steam heat and the crowds, dressing three and four times a day, mirrors, cold cream, rouge; silly talk, manners, lies to people you are bored to death with—I never want to see that again, never!"

Alice was worried, bitterly. Knowing Joan as she knew her sister she had reason to worry. Joan had her way, always. If nothing happened to change her Joan would do the mad thing she threatened—she would marry Nelson and exile herself for life—in Katmak.

Alice had a private worry more intimate than Joan's madness, that was Streeter. Streeter loved her. She could tell it in a hundred little things he did or did not do, said or left unsaid. Her helplessness had appealed to the hulking mining engineer. It was Streeter's daily task to help her limping footsteps; to order her to frequent rests; to throw his heavy mackinaw over her silly, tattered silk sweater in the evenings and on chill mornings; to see that she had the best of their uncertain food of game or fish and the softest bed to lie upon. She grew to fear Streeter and his love; but most of all she feared her own heart.

On the ninth day of their tragically slow progress—they calculated that by this time they had advanced perhaps eighteen miles toward Katmak and tramped a hundred—Alice found herself alone with Streeter. They were resting. Nelson and her sister had pushed on ahead.

"And would you never leave the north?" Streeter had no idea how Alice choked over the question or how much it meant to her. "Streeter, if you had all the money you want—if you could live where you please and do what you like?"

"I'd live at—Katmak," Streeter answered promptly. "I know you think I'm crazy. You've got in mind cities and people—books and plays and pictures and comforts and you think it's because I don't know better I say so. I do know better. I've tried them, tried them all and only

here, where I can see the hills and the sky and sea, out here where things haven't been curled and shaved and barbered do I really feel decent—fit—alive. It's in my blood. My father prospected in Alaska nearly all his life. I inherited the taint if you please to call it that. I'll live here and I'll die here, God willing. So far as I'm concerned, the rest of it is all bosh—"

"Well, let's go on." Alice sighed dismally.

She limped silently on beside him. Often his hand caught hers to help her over a log, or his arm lifted her up a steep rock. He parted the thorny brush to make a path for her, but she let these attentions pass without a sign.

They came to a halt on the lip of a deep ravine. The trail was skirting the edge of a towering cliff and here the rock had been split open so that looking through the gash one could see, hideously far beneath, a glimpse of black reefs and the surf creaming over them. Back into the shoulder of the mountain the ravine ran an unknown distance. For their crossing there was a bridge of a single log, the trunk of a fallen Douglas fir that spanned the abyss.

Alice shrank back. "I can't—possibly—do that," she murmured through white lips.

"Got to," Streeter rejoined definitely.

"But I can't—I'll fall—"

"No, you won't. See here, stand behind me, hands on my belt to steady yourself. Come—"

He mounted the log and stepped over the void.

Alice hesitated, terrified. Finally Streeter's sharp glance, the warning of compressed lips and knotted brows drove her to a timid effort.

Both feet on the broad log Alice moved timorously. Her groping hands extended to reach him—then her eyes strayed downward. She caught that glimpse of creaming surf and black reefs, hideously far beneath her and between only the thin air. Her knees sagged as she whirled and leaped desperately for solid ground where she lay with arms extended, frantically embracing the earth.

Streeter was beside her in a step. He

said no more. His hands closed about her and she was lifted into his arms. Then he was out upon the log, moving surely and swiftly. Alice's arms about his neck almost choked him. She dared not open her eyes. She knew she was safe when he dropped her with scant ceremony, on her feet.

The sudden flare of her anger took his breath away. She raised her white face to his good-natured grin and the blue eyes were dilated like an angry cat's.

"Stay in your country, your filthy, dirty country," she spat. "I hate it, you hear? Hate it, hate it!"

Streeter could think of nothing at all to reply. He was numb with astonishment. So he plodded on and behind him Alice followed, a forlorn, ridiculously clad little figure that suggested in its carriage a rebellious child.

Streeter was not only surprised; his good nature was outraged. In her hatred of the land she seemed to hate him too. He was hurt and angry at her. She attacked him without excuse—and just when he had helped her. He could only decide it was just like a woman.

Not being able to read Alice's mind, how was he to know that what he heard was her frightened defiance of the thing she feared? How could he guess that she was fighting love, fighting desperately, like a wild thing cornered, struggling to escape the very future Joan welcomed so gladly?

V.

JOAN discovered the point where the cliffs crumbled away and a long spit of sand extended far into the sea.

"There is the place," she decided, "where we'd better build a cache and leave word for the yacht. They're bound to begin looking for us by now. We must do everything we can to let them know where we are."

There was no denying Joan's good sense. They found their way to the end of the spit where they spent some hours erecting a tall pole with a message placed at its base.

There was some debate also about mak-

ing camp on the spit and waiting. Joan was against that and Joan carried the day.

"The odds against us are too great," she insisted. "By leaving the cache we play safe—double-shooting the turn, as it were—but if we don't keep on trying for ourselves we cut down our chances again. In an hour the Haida, if it finds our message, could overtake as much as we can do in a day. If they find us the delay won't amount to anything. But let's go on, keeping to the beach if we can."

Nelson agreed. Streeter had no objection. Alice was apathetic.

"Good," cried Joan. She snatched up her own pack and led the way. "I simply can't stand waiting for things to happen," she confessed to Nelson as they swung along. "Want to make 'em happen." And that revealed the true motive which brought them into new perils.

Joan swung along briskly, glad of the freedom of beach sands again after their days in the hills.

All felt more light hearted, even Alice, but she gave no sign to Streeter. Since her venomous declaration of the day before, she had avoided speaking to him. She plodded on manfully, telling herself over and over again that very soon now the yacht would come; that she would wake from this nightmare in her own mahogany and white stateroom where there was a toilet mirror and a table glittering with all the silver-mounted and cut-glass toys that kept her skin soft and her hair sleek.

They encountered the cliffs again, descending sheer to a narrow strip of sand. It was a steep beach and mark of the high tide was plain along the rock barrier, higher than their heads. When the flow was out it could be walked, but to be caught there by the flood would mean drowning.

Streeter remembered the place.

"Came here once in a canoe with old Chief Charley Moses," he said. "These cliffs run south like this for three miles, not a break in the wall. After that there's a pretty good stretch, just plain cut bank and a chance to climb out of reach of the flood. If we can make it—"

"Tide's just turning," said Joan.

"And the wind's inshore, and pretty

stiff. It 'll come fast now," Nelson calculated.

"Three miles," Streeter considered. "Even Miss Alice can do that in two hours—"

"Like a cement pavement," Joan cried eagerly. "And we all know how long it will take to climb back again. Let's go!"

They would have made the three mile stretch easily but for chance, which was one thing none of them allowed in the planning. Chance played them a queer trick—they discovered the yacht.

Alice was the first to see it. Perhaps that was because she thought of little else. Her shrill scream and pointing arm turned their eyes seaward and there, far out on the horizon, a tiny, flashing, white toy steamed the Haida.

With one accord they shouted.

The slight volume of their voices beat back to them on the rising wind, and still they called. Four puny figures, dwarfed to ridiculous size by the towering cliffs they ran, gesticulating, knee-deep into the creamy breakers, trying to span the cold gray distance of a choppy sea with the reedlike notes of their voices.

Nelson remembered his pistol and fired away rounds of ammunition he needed.

And the yacht steamed on serenely, a toy ship drawn by an invisible thread across the hard gray line of horizon.

They turned and ran with it, keeping pace, so it seemed from the beach. There was no thought of fatigue—a mad, scrambling race against the inevitable—an effort foredoomed to failure. But they were human and made suddenly insane with loneliness and fear of the desolation they had laughed at—children in a panic.

Streeter was first to halt then.

"The tide," he panted. "Got to turn—run for it—barely time now."

Joan and Nelson he shook into a state of reason. But Alice had kept on. She ignored their shouts. Streeter was obliged to run after her while the other two waited.

The big man ran badly. He was already pretty well winded and his bulk unfitted him for racing. But the girl he pursued seemed to be endowed with a supernatural strength. Alice the weakest of them all,

the lamed laggard, sped down the beach as if she had wings.

When Streeter finally caught her arm she was lost to all reason. She struggled to get free and in their struggle her sharp little nails clawed red marks along his unshaven cheeks. After his first expostulation he said nothing. They fought grimly and silently until the big Alaskan actually swept her from her feet and turned her about. He was half carrying, half dragging the girl when Nelson ran to his assistance. Together they forced her to go with them, her every step an insane protest, her head turned constantly over her shoulder toward the yacht, now only a dim wisp of smoke against the pale sky.

Both men looked white and serious. When their glances met they turned aside fearfully.

Joan fell in with them, silent. They saved breath for hurry and the three scanned the towering rock walls with anxious eyes, hoping vainly to discover some cleft, some ledge or elevated boulder that would give them shelter against the coming flood.

VI.

THE last wave had broken about them, flowing more than knee deep. In the little niche among the cliffs, where they were finally driven, they could get but a narrow, restricted view of a sea broken with combers, great gray-green bulks that struggled to sweep their tons of water upon them; subsided with roaring, failure and licked them with envious tongues, rejoicing in the coming victory.

Joan's head was buried against Nelson's shoulder. Sometimes they spoke in low whispers, then were silent for long intervals.

"It was glorious," Joan murmured her lips against his ear. "From the very first I loved the life—as I loved you. That makes it easier, doesn't it, dear?"

Nelson whispered back, "You were mine, always. Some way I don't mind—about the rest."

Streeter's arm was about Alice's shoulder, trying to steady her against the wash. Already the undertow threatened to drag them out to sea.

Alice had become passive in the face of death. The first touch of the waves had quenched her insanity. She had stood beside Streeter docile, waiting. As his arm held her firm against the wash she broke the long silence.

"Do you think it will be—very hard—to go?"

"You shan't go. Streeter's jaw tightened. "Listen," he whispered, "I'll hold you. When the wash comes higher I'll lift you above it. I'll lift you higher still, no matter how it breaks. I'm strong, Alice—"

Alice seized the lapel of his heavy mackinaw and pulled him toward her. "Hold me now," she whispered.

"Not now—when the flood rises—need to save for that—"

"No, now! My dear, you think I'd let you do that! When you go, take me with you—in your arms. I'd rather—"

"Alice!"

"Yes, I mean I love you, Streeter. I'm not ashamed to tell you that—"

"Alice!"

She struggled in his embrace, seeking the breath to whisper on. "I wouldn't have told you—ever—not if we had got away. I couldn't. Your home is here—you see, that comes between us. I—I hate it. Perhaps I might have changed you, my dear, I know how to get my own way! I might have made you follow me outside, to my world—but I wouldn't do that! I think that you have been cruel—a man like you. Like a wild thing in a cage—no, you belong here. And I hate it!"

"You'd have learned to like it—Joan does—"

"I could never like it—too selfish, luxurious and self-indulgent, I suppose.

"No, I shall always hate it, but this—this tide business—it's all settled for us, isn't it? And I do love you, Streeter."

After the silence she whispered again. "Aren't you glad it's—*this*—aren't you glad?"

"My dear!" Streeter groaned.

"Because you know, even now Streeter, if the yacht came, if something were to happen I—I wouldn't keep a promise. I couldn't. I'm—well, not made that way. But as it is, there's no worry—just know-

ing we care more for each other than anything else—and we'll go—together—held tight like this. Won't we?"

"We'll face it together—loving each other," Streeter promised. And then he glanced out on the sea that was claiming them, boldly, unafraid, his brows level and defiance in his look. He glanced—and groaned again, shaken by despair in the sudden realization that they were saved.

The Haida's tender had poked its glistering wet prow within the narrow range of their vision.

VII.

THE Haida lay at anchor off Katmak and the two women waited on its deck the coming of a canoe bringing Nelson and Streeter. A day of complete rest had done wonders for them. Both had dressed for dinner in silk and laces and satins they had never expected to feel again. In the reaction against hardships they had gone to extravagant lengths. Below decks a silent Japanese boy in white was deftly setting glass and silverware for an extravagant meal.

They saw the canoe leave Katmak's one little dock. Joan's hand closed over her sister's and gripped it so tight Alice cried in pain.

"Alice," she whispered, "Alice, I—I *can't* do it! To-night I've got to tell him. I've got to tell him that I lied. I can't marry him—to live here—in this awful place—"

Alice nodded, mute. She was not greatly surprised. She knew Joan.

"As soon as we got back on the yacht—as soon as I saw a dressing-table again, I knew it was all off," Joan went on, seeking justification. "I can't help it, can I? This is part of my life. I loved the other too—the camps and the bigness of the nights—the smell of fir boughs, the emptiness—and adventure. But this is a part of what I want—too big a part. I can't go without it. It's change that I crave—excitement. Now I know that I want to get back, back to the Avenue, back to the place where things happen. Nelson would never go—or only for pitiful little trips and, Alice, I'd

be out of the world until the day I died—an outcast. He won't leave his Indians—he's mad about them—insane over what he calls his duty. I can't stand that. Outdoors? Yes, that's good enough in its way but let me get back to the Avenue and I'll live there. And I swear here and now I'll never go farther north than the art museum nor farther south than Brentano's. I might as well be honest, mightn't I?"

"I'll miss you," said Alice huskily.

"What do you mean? Alice, you won't—you're not going to—"

Alice sobbed. But she answered firmly, "I'm going to keep my word. I'll marry Streeter—"

"You're crazy—insane! Marry him? Live in this forsaken hole? It will drive you to idiocy—"

"Perhaps—"

"You hate it. You say you do—"

"I do. I loathe the place, everything, about it—"

"Then just to keep your word—a silly promise in a silly moment—you're not fair to yourself—"

"It was not a silly promise, Joan. I meant it. I love Streeter. I can't help

that. I love a man, not a country. I can't change his home, I know. So I've got to accept it—"

"Of all the idiocy!"

"Perhaps it is." Alice was serene. "I can't help it. I love Streeter—"

"And you want to bury yourself alive—"

"I was ready yesterday to die with him. I am to-day—"

"But slow torture. Years in this—Katmak!"

Alice's head rose proudly.

"Joan," she declared with a terrible earnestness, "I told you it was the man I loved, not Katmak. If he leaves here, so do I. He may go where he pleases, if only he takes me. When he dies, God grant I may lay down and die beside him. I don't blame you for going back. I'd give anything in the world—except Streeter's love—to go back with you. I'll break my heart with memories, but here I stay with him."

The canoe was nearing the yacht. Alice ran to the rail, a fragile, slender, colorful little figure in incongruous finery. She stretched two bare, white arms eagerly into the cold air, welcoming the man she loved.



TWO MEN OF OLD

TO live and love and sing sweet songs

Was all the poet sought.

His robe was threadbare, but he wore

A diadem of thought.

The plodders blamed his dreamy ways,

Nor knew what he had wrought.

The statesman schemed and spent his wealth

To buy immortal fame.

The emperor of half the world

To grace his banquets came;

And many little busy men

Were noisy with his name.

A thousand years of days and nights

And names have rolled away.

The statesman's proud, ephemeral fame

Sleeps with his nameless clay;

But the little songs the poet sang

The whole world knows to-day.

Elsa Barker.

East Is Not West by Rex Parson

Author of "Southwest of the Law," "The Desert Thrill," etc.

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO DUTY'S PATH.

THOUGH Cecilia still swayed a little from the weakness of her too sudden meeting with the storm's terror, Pete left her where she stood, and walked around to the other side of the mango-tree. All the innocent, wholly unconscious joy-swagger was gone; he stooped and sagged in his gait.

"Look for white mammy," she heard him bid one of the shivering boys. "Say be better she come for here."

She understood. He was impressed that he had insulted her beyond any conceivable apology, that he had shown himself so base it would be further insult to speak again an unnecessary word.

She did not wait for the boy to appear; she started around the tree's base. She was not surprised that Peter kept the trunk between them and returned to the less sheltered spot as she left it. But seeing him perform this dodging act threatened for a moment to set off all the straining emotions of the last hours in wild shrieks of hysterical laughter.

Then a more than sobering thought made any kind of laughter the farthest thing in the world from her feelings. It was the realization that Peter was right. His acts might just now take on the appearance of a child's game of peek-a-boo; they were bringing curious little grins to the faces

of the black boys. They were really the rites essential to a splendid sacrifice of expiation and of duty.

Though he was wrong about her, he was right about himself. He knew now that he loved a woman who was promised to another, would be another's wife within a couple of hours. That other had trusted her to his care. Though the storm, and not he, was responsible for such measure of betrayal of trust as he had been guilty of—it was not for him to weaken his own moral fiber with the least excuse. And no excuse for the past moments could alter in the least the plain duty of honor for the future. That duty was to keep as far away from her as possible.

And that must be duty for her—to accept his total aloofness and to help him maintain it. She might not even alleviate his abject shame by telling him that his embrace and his kisses had not insulted or offended her, or that her yield to them had been but begun in a spasm of fear, to continue in a very madness of joy in them so tensely sweet that it would leave its pain to the last moment of her life.

She, too, had learned that she loved where she had no right to love. Early responsibilities had early taught her wisdom. There can be no explanations, no understandings, no good-bys in parting with wrong attachments. They are but further dalliance with the wrong.

She had given her love—or, at least, its

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for January 8.

promise—to one with a need for her. Her nature and the whole habit of her life made another's need her duty. She did not require to be sure that Cecil Weak's had attracted her in any other respect than the fact that he was afflicted and wanted her care to an extent no other had ever pretended to want it. One of the world's givers was Cecilia.

Perhaps for the first time, a mighty wave of rebellion arose within her now. It was hard, fearfully hard, to accept the fact that these brief days of happiness had ended at the very moment when happiness had been lifted to its zenith by understanding of its significance.

But it was all over—just as all her joy in her youngest and favorite brother had been over the day they handed her the telegram in the English hospital that told her he had been killed two weeks before.

And she would do again what she had had to do then. Then a patient had needed her, and she had gone and ministered to him—and smiled. And now she would go the rest of the journey to Suwali to meet a husband who needed her—and would smile.

It came to her that she would better go quickly. She could get no drier here than in the canoe. And she had become suddenly colder than anything in the past week had allowed her to dream she could become in West Africa. She was in a chill.

African fevers are no different from many other diseases. And nothing is surer in all the science of mental therapeutics than that real joy is a better antitoxin than ninety per cent of the serums that medicine will ever discover. She had actually been getting over the last of the effects of the long strain of nursing, improving in health, before to-day. Now the magic elixir was gone.

For the first time she had to suggest a need of hers to Peter Winter:

"I think we'll all be better to keep right on going, now that the dangerous part of the storm is over."

He looked at her. He suppressed a gasp of misery, as he saw the chill-quiver of her chin, the washed-out white of her face. Then he looked again and steadily.

"I reckon yo' right. And I'll trouble you to take a few pills, and you'd better let me spoil yo' comfo't by putting the pillows ovah you instead of undeh. Even if they are wet they'll be better'n nothin' at all."

His voice was steady—a little hoarse, she thought. He spoke then to the boys. He spoke to her once or twice more as he directed the taking of medicines from her own case, which she had selected under advice of an experienced traveler in the tropics—as he helped her bundle herself in what poor protection they could devise against all that remained of the storm, but still what would have been counted a tremendous downpour in a more livable climate.

But every word and act was as painstakingly and painfully impersonal as the coldest manner she had ever employed with some convalescent doughboy inclined to grow too sentimental. She might almost have laughed at it.

But again there was something to kill laughter—to give an inward chill worse than that physical one which would not yield even to the burning, raw liquor he had given her to drink. His voice—that voice which had set half the Slave Coast on edge with its hilarious roaring—had gone so quiet that it might not have disturbed the nerves of a shell-shock patient. She had never thought she would miss a voice like that.

They were but an hour from their destination. By the end of the first half of that hour the rain had ceased. The only words either of them spoke in the hour were spoken then:

"The sun will wa'm you faster than those wet pillows now."

"Thank you," she replied as he helped her loosen a withe of cane which one of the boys had contributed as aid in the job of bundling her in the pillows.

And so, at length, they came to a beach, somewhat smaller but not much more drearily uninviting than all the other mud beaches she had seen with their big tin shacks, their laborers clad mostly in dirt, their heaps of broken barrels and cases awaiting the hands of carpenters and coopers, their grime and oil and grease. And, all at once, the stark ugliness of it seemed beyond en-

durance; she wanted to throw herself into the black water and end everything.

Then she saw Cecil Weaks hurrying down from beside one of the buildings. His thin, slightly stooped figure, his nervous gait, his pallid features, his smile, revealing the small, even teeth and reminding her a little of the grimaces brave boys had made of smiles while they endured untold tortures in the hospitals—these left her cold and unable to respond as she knew she should, as she must respond.

"I thought you'd be held up longer by the storm," he was apologizing for not having met them. "Nobody told me you were coming yet. I'd have been down in a canoe to meet you. Why—"

"Cecilia, are you ill? You're all wet."

"Better now," she answered. "Peter dosed me up terribly after the rain, and—"

His really big affliction came to her mind as she saw his hand go to his ear, and knew that she could not possibly make him hear across the few feet of water which still separated the canoe from the landing-steps. She could only shake her head in denial of his alarmed query; and, to relieve his mind more fully as to any danger that she was not ready to take up the task of being his wife and helper—she smiled.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEART OF AFRICA.

"IF you-all take my advice, pardner," Pete Winter now put in, "you'll tell yo' pahson to make a sho't shift of his job, an' then you'll see that she's done up in hot blankets an' gen'ly dosed up afoah she gets a regulah case of fevah. I gave her some quinin and phenacetin and a swallow of liquo'; but it hasn't touched the spot yet."

"I'm sure our parson won't mind hurrying. He hopes to get up-creek to Idda before all the night is gone. He stepped down into the village a few moments ago, to see a sick member of the flock, I believe. But he'll be back before any of us can get into our wedding garments.

"My darling!" Weaks was helping her from the canoe as he now changed his tone to one of tender solicitude. "I ought not

to have brought you out to this beastly climate. But—but—well—I didn't seem to feel the need so much before the infernal war blew my ears up. I could hear more then—and it wasn't so deadly lonely, don't you know?

"Oh, you mustn't get sick! I couldn't bear that. But you won't. We'll give you a little more stimulant to see you through with the bit of ceremony. Then we'll just cut the dinner, if you're not up to it. I'll tuck you in bed as friend Pete here suggests. Couldn't have been much of a celebration anyhow—with just you and me and Peter to eat it."

He had her by the arm, and now he started her briskly toward the one of the tin buildings which boasted an upper story, the "residence" of the "factory," as she had come to know the general layout of the trading-stations. She could scarce keep pace with him while every joint raised painful protest after the long cramp of the canoe; and her feet seemed to feel the weight of her wet ties as tons of lead. He had already got sufficiently accustomed to his deafness to avoid asking questions when he could not hope to hear their answers, and he chattered on:

"Lord! it's a relief to know you're here at last. I don't think I could have kept up much longer. It's been knowing that you were coming that has saved me from ending it all. Of course women like you can't realize what they really do for a man.

"I must ask you to forgive me for bringing you to this hole. I just had to have you, you know. Lord bless you! I feel better just for the sight of you—and—"

They had reached the top of the stairs to the veranda at the second floor of the residence. He swept her into his arms and pressed his lips to hers.

Surprise and an unreasoning anger leaped up within her trembling frame. The surprise came at the sudden strength in his arms. It seemed a sort of denial of the invalid frailty with which she had subconsciously endowed him. Their short hospital ward courtship and engagement in England had afforded no opportunity for caresses and outward marks of affection.

The anger she could not understand in

the least. Two hours ago a man had kissed her who had no right to do so—and his kisses had seemed a benediction from heaven. The one man who had the right to kiss her had done so—and she felt as if her lips had been scorched with sulfur flame from hell.

"You'd better give me that drink," she shouted hastily into his ears. The fever was getting to her brain. Nothing else could account for these distorted notions and sentiments.

He hurried her into the door before them, shouting: "Leopa!" as they entered. She was glad that it was a girl who responded.

"Brandy and soda—*wah!*" he commanded tersely.

Cecilia stared after the girl's retreating figure. She passed a hot hand over her eyes. She grew uneasy. If this kept up she would be unable to follow the marriage service or make the responses. And, instead of taking up her real place in life, she would be but an added burden for a while on the shoulders of the one she had come to help.

Her brain must be afire. Nothing else could account for the revulsion she had just felt at the kiss of the man she had loved, was not willing to admit that she did not yet love. And nothing else could account for what she had thought she had just seen in the eyes of that black girl. Cat's eyes, tiger's eyes, the eyes of a rattlesnake—might hold that glitter, but not human eyes. Least of all the eyes of negroes, which could be soft and happy and mischievous and pleading and pathetic and almost everything else but poisonously hateful.

The girl was back in a moment with a bottle of brandy and two small soda-bottles, and the necessary glasses.

"Say when," Weaks bade her, pouring into the glass nearest her on the tray. "You've had a rough time, enough to make you need a good one. But we mustn't make the cure worse than the disease. Oh—a little more than that won't hurt. There.

"To your eyes! Jove! I've been fairly wild with fear that, when you saw the bleak, ugly place it is down here—and that woolly concentrate of wild West show waiting to claim you as his long-lost sister—

you'd just stay on the ship until it took you home again. Or, are there more like Peter in the States?"

The liquor barely cleared her senses to catch the sneer in his query.

And the clearness in her brain turned to clear wrath. She swallowed hard, choking on the hot indignation that rose within her, trying to get a voice with which to shout for his hearing a blistering comparison between Pete Winter and any man who could not see through him to the big fineness inside.

And Pete came in, three blacks following in his wake, her water-stained trunks on their bare shoulders.

"Another glass, Leopa—and soda," Weaks bade the girl. Pete's eyes had fallen on the bottle with a look that made Cecilia uneasy lest he signalize his general misery by getting miserably drunk. "My treat, old chap—or, a whole bottle of good Scotch if you'd prefer. You've earned it."

Her own words had had to die unspoken. She hoped Pete would resent her fiancé's patronage to the extent of hurling a glass or two at his head. But Pete didn't.

"I got plenty of liquo' in my room," he said dully, though with that same loudness which had nothing behind it but the wish to make the deaf man hear what he said. "Thank you kindly, all the same," he added with a tired effort at a smile.

Without waiting for Pete to get his drink Weaks reminded Cecilia of their need for haste and started her for the door from which the carriers were just emerging after leaving her trunks on the floor.

"Leopa—you be white mammy's maid." He spoke crisply to the black girl.

The room had been done in more luxury than Cecilia had expected. It was not the luxury she would have chosen; it was not homelike; it rather reflected the orientalism Weaks must have picked up before landing in Africa. Just now she did not care about that. Everything in her had become a turmoil wherein she could not distinguish right reason or true sentiment from things she suspected of being hallucinations of incipient delirium.

She had to think. In spite of Weaks's haste, she dropped into a reclining chair that

was luxury's own lap; but sat up straight in it, supporting her swimming head with her hands.

"You may bring me hot water, Leopa," she said to the maid, as the result of her first effort to reflect calmly. She had glimpsed one of those absurd little foot-tubs they call a bath in England, through the open door of the large closet next the room. She could be calmer with the black girl out of her sight.

Calmer—and then she knew that her inward raving was foolish and must remain futile. After all, she had no right to demand that her husband see in Peter Winter all that she saw. It really was no injustice to Peter to admit that even she herself, in just her present physical condition, would find his too noisy exuberance a strain, if she did not—

Love him! Yes—she loved him—loved him as she had never known she could love, loved every bit of him, loved his very crudities because they were part of him.

But she must not love him—the love was wrong. And so—and so—calmer now—she must go on. She began the removal of her wet clothes.

Suddenly her blood was chilled with a new shock. Through the open window came a series of wild yells. Fierce, terrible things they sounded—human voices in inhuman fury—the shrieks of men permanently or momentarily mad. It was at some distance—somewhere off in the bush which, she had already guessed, hid the mud village of Suwali. But it went to her fevered nerves with but one possible significance—an attack upon the settlement.

From somewhere in the building came the sound of running feet to enhance her terror. Then Weak's voice calling in the hall:

"Peter—Peter! I say—do you hear something?"

"Well, rathuh!" Pete shouted back. "Sounds like they were pullin' yo' missionary to pieces and quarreling about who gets the souvenirs."

"Oh, that's nonsense—but, I can't go to see what the bally row's about—I've got to dress. And they couldn't make me hear what they were saying if I went."

"Suah—I'll go. I reckon a little action would just about suit me now—kind o' wa'm me up."

And she heard Pete's boots go at a heavy run through the hallway, then clatter down the stairs. There was no doubting from his tone and speed that he went with a certain eagerness to be gone. He hardly counted the mission dangerous.

Once more Cecilia began her disrobing. She had finished and slipped into a dressing-gown before the black girl came back with a steaming kettle of water.

She concluded, after several efforts to tell her in different ways, that she had made Leopa comprehend her directions for the preparation of the bath. She went to the dressing-table to see what prospects there were for a passable arrangement of her hair which had been but partly dried when she had gathered it up a bit in the canoe for the landing. Seated before the mirror, she had drawn the whole mass forward over her face and was laboring with a comb on the damp snarls when a reflected glimpse of the room behind her, caught between the dark strands of the hair, seemed to turn her to stone.

The black girl had finished her task, it appeared. She was standing quite still, her eyes fixed on the back of Cecilia's dressing-gown. Her poise was one of a lithe, easy grace that was willowness to the *n*th degree. But every line of it suggested just one thing—a crouched cat, ready to spring at a bird on the ground. Yet the poise was not so deadly in its significance as a glow in the utterly black eyes which seemed a vivid, actually physical flame of malignant hate too virulent for the most savage of four-footed beasts, to match which one must have searched among the venomous creatures that crawl.

The very look seemed to paralyze the white woman. It was moments before she could even cover up her surprise by resuming the fingering and combing of her hair. She had hardly succeeded in doing this much—she was still finding it quite impossible to get a breath that could be depended on to produce an audible scream—when she detected a stealthy movement of the black girl's hand.

Slowly it was buried in folds of the long, crimson cloth which was draped to form the girl's only garment. It came out as slowly—only a little way. Cecilia could barely see that it clutched a bit of polished wood. She could guess something as to the type of blade attached to that wood and still concealed under the cloth; she had seen some white men's collections of native weapons.

With a final, supreme effort of will Cecilia raised her voice as if freeing herself from a nightmare's grip, in a single, piercing scream.

Then she remembered that the only white man within range was so deaf there was no hope in the world that he could hear her.

CHAPTER VII.

WHITE MAN'S MEDICINE.

PETER headed for the sounds of rioting with a sense of relief almost amounting to joy. At least he would not have to witness the marriage ceremony. Big or little, the scrap ahead would make him too late for the most belated renewal of the last silly rite of kissing the bride. He did not want to kiss—a bride.

He had never explored much about the village. Two or three villages down the river had fed him up on their meager stock of curiosities; his nose, brought from the wind-swept prairies, could get sated on native perfumes twice daily in his rounds of work among the negroes.

It was more of a village than he had thought. And it was more sparsely settled than the others he had seen. The sounds of the conflict seemed to lead him onward like a will-o'-the-wisp. Two or three times the paths he chose petered out at a last, lone hut, leaving him with such a net of bush before him that he could hope to go back to another trail much more quickly than to try to cut through ahead.

His only motive for haste was his eagerness for a fight. Of course he had no real idea that they were attacking a white missionary. That had been but one of the turns of his native humor. He could hardly have had an idea of what he was to see.

His first vision was that of two naked

Sobos trying to pull a black bottle of gin apart with one hand apiece and to kill each other with the hand apiece thus left free. As he caught sight of this the grip of one loosened momentarily. The other made quick use of the advantage, to bring the bottle down on his head. He, victor, had completely faded into the bush before Peter could run up to the loser, who seemed to have lost his life as well as his drink.

And Peter had come in sight of the weirdest battle either he or Africa ever witnessed.

It was not a battle; it was forty battles. The bush seemed to be full of them, single-handed battles—battles in which a score or more all hammered and cut and choked and gouged each other, standing-up battles like life-and-death boxing contests, wrestling matches with the combatants rolling over and over in the mud as they clawed and bit and tore at one another's flesh; human cock-fights, with the men on their knees and their hands in each other's wool; battles of hands, battles of feet and legs, battles of teeth—no two of the individual conflicts were alike save in two respects: the fighting was amazingly and often unmentionably foul; and, at the bottom of every single fight was a black bottle of gin.

The air reeked and seemed fairly drunken with the fumes of the coarse, deadly stuff, its odor blending sickeningly with the sweat from black bodies, the stirred-up dankness of mud, the stench of blood. For many of the bottles had been shattered and the fights over them could only avenge their destruction. But mostly they were whole and full and heavy enough to be the most dangerous implements as well as the objects of the fighting.

No doubt a prohibition orator could have made a lot out of the scene. To Peter it seemed at first that his only real concern was as to how much gin had been stolen from the factory store. He had seen enough ranch-house free-for-alls and battles in the Great War to cure him of any squeamishness at a few cracked scalps and slashed skins. But, as one mass of men broke up, leaving two of its units unmistakably dead, he waded into another wriggling conglomeration nearer him.

By the simple act of hurling the men

apart he spoiled the solving of the delicate problem whether four jaws could sever the joints of four thumbs before the four thumbs tore out as many cheeks. The four several owners of the jaws and thumbs and cheeks had dropped the bottle from their other four hands at sight of him. The only one who looked as if he had strength enough left for speech, Pete jerked to his feet by the wool and demanded:

"Wheah'd you-all steal that gin?"

If that particular culprit had ever known enough English to grasp the question, he had forgotten it now. Nor was there an answer from any of the other groups. At sound of his first bellowed syllable, those other groups had somehow thinned. For all that could be seen the last syllable reached only ears that were beyond hearing anything. But Peter got an answer, hardly less surprising than all the rest of the scene.

"Him no be thief black man. Him no steal them gin. Be so, Cap'n Weak', him speak for us give village man t'ree case gin for make him happy for why Cap'n Weak' marry white mammy."

The voice was well known to Winter, and the man himself, as he stepped easily from behind the bush around a sizable mango-tree, was one of the husky beach-boys from the "factory." He was followed by another and half a dozen of Weak's watch-boys, their clubs idly dangling from their straps. The men had evidently been appreciative spectators at the contest.

"Be so," two of them corroborated the first. "Cap'n Weak' speak for me bring plenty gin; him speak take plenty too far from fac'ry. Be so, Sobo man get plenty drunk, make plenty too much noise. White mammy no like too much noise."

Peter did not believe them. But their presence on the scene provided somebody who could be held accountable for the theft. And the fighting villagers had ceased to be present. It hardly seemed worth his while to lose himself in pursuit of individual fights which were audibly resuming in almost all directions away from the factory. The sobriety of the beach and watch-boys was at least one thing corroborative of their story. More quickly developed.

"Now," the first speaker turned to his fellows, yet keeping a tentative eye on Winter, "we go for fac'ry. Now Mass' Tomi give plenty gin for fac'ry boy. Fac'ry boy get plenty too much drunk."

And they went, with Peter following them near enough to see that this was not a ruse to get out of his reach. Tomi, the native clerk at the factory store, from vastly superior Lagos, with a regular reading-and-writing-and-'rithmetic education, would be the last man in the world to abet a ginf-theft by these contemptible Sobo "under-dogs." He might steal for himself; he would enforce the law, for the sheer pleasure of it, against them.

And when the eight boys went into the store and came whooping out of it again, each possessed of his individual gin-bottle, and the clerk himself had closed the store door behind them—there could be little doubt that Weak had sent the village men gin to scramble for in celebration of his wedding.

"We-ell," Pete reflected ruefully. "I reckon I'd just about be plumb foolish myself."

From a sufficiently secluded vantage behind the corner of the kernel-house, he watched the boys decapitate the bottles with single strokes of their machetes and reflected on the advantages to the rest of society of their purposefully businesslike speed in the attainment of blind, oblivious stupor, with none of the stops on the way whereby more civilized drunkards, partly stupefied but not at all helpless, enliven their drinking.

Of the canoes which floated at the edge of the beach, most were deserted. In one or two the owners had long since attained the ultimate bliss of oblivion and lay sprawled on the bottoms. The rest were probably taking theirs in various sheltered spots about the beach. From farther back in the bush there still came sufficient racket of fighting to account at the residence for his absence from the ceremonies.

Peter's slight curiosity dwelt on four men who stood distinguished from the scene of generally dead drunkenness—sober. They squatted in a large, black, and exceptionally dingy canoe. It was laughably—or pitiful-

ly—evident that their beady eyes were aching with envy of their better provided brethren.

Yet they made no move to test the strength of the smallest possessor of a bottle; they did not even creep toward those bottles which had fallen from paralyzed fingers, still half full. Peter wondered. He thought he had recognized that canoe as the property of a particularly ugly eyed old native trader who came once a week and took away a few kegs of kernels which seemed to have been selected for him in advance.

"Mission niggers!" he suddenly exclaimed as the explanation of their abstemiousness broke upon him. As usual, the sacrifices of the righteous went dishonored in the thought of the ungodly. Peter laughed. Perhaps he suspected that the abstinence would have been absent had the abstainers been less certain of their master's appearance at almost any moment.

The idea was strengthened as they suddenly rose to a slovenly attention and shifted to their places in the canoe. A figure, arrayed in solemn funeral-black, was hurrying toward them from the residence.

All at once Peter's back snapped up straight from the corner of the kernel-house, against which he had been lounging easily. He had sensed the significance of that black-clad figure's shuffling gait. Now a glimpse of the face corroborated—the man himself was black.

Flashed into his brain the memory of the words for which he had come very near thrashing Tammas Craig last night: "None too guid to ha'e a *ju-ju* chief for the ceremony."

Then he laughed at himself—and was ashamed of the disloyalty of the suspicion against his friend. This was certainly no chief. A chief might adopt white man's clothes—but not white man's somberest black clothes. Of course the man was a native preacher. As a matter of fact, Peter did not know but the missionary at Idda was an educated black convert.

But he had no intention to spy on any one. He stepped away from the half shelter of the kernel-house and ambled toward the canoe.

"All finished?" he asked of the shambling black parson.

The preacher had evidently been too much preoccupied with his own haste to note the white assistant agent's approach. He looked up, startled beyond all reason that Peter could sense.

But nothing could have startled him as a look at his face startled Peter. It was the ugly, scarred, wicked-leering face of the old trader in selected kernels!

"Beli! by—" wheezed from Peter's throat. Then his feet leaped, and his hands reached for the back of the old man's absurd white collar as the native ducked to escape him.

CHAPTER VIII.

CECILIA LEARNS AFRICA.

CECILIA BALDWIN'S scream had startled the black girl coming with sudden unexpectedness from the tangle of hair in which the white mammy's fingers still worked convulsively, though the comb had clattered to the floor. Leopa had darted her hand back beneath her garment's folds, and withdrawn it, empty, with such lightning quickness that it almost shook Cecilia's confidence in what she thought she had seen in it.

Then the black girl stood staring, listening—her jet eyes flashing back and forth from the room's outer door to the woman at the dressing-table, waiting to see whether there would be any response to the shriek that had frightened her only for a second. Cecilia thought fast.

No footsteps sounded through the building. No one had heard.

She could not make the foolish mistake of hoping to match strength with the black girl. The smooth, brown skin held muscles as pliant as a snake's and tough as hippohide. Leopa was still two inches the better in height. And—she would fight as no civilized person could begin to fight. Besides, she had the dagger.

Cecilia had turned from the dressing-table to face the girl directly. But she knew that there was nothing on it which could be turned to use as a weapon. The

helmet which she had lost in the storm had neither carried away or left any hatpins. Those she owned were packed in the bottom of one of the trunks against the possibility of her return some day to a land where women's head-wear needed pins.

In the bottom of another trunk was a tiny pearl-handled pistol, unloaded. The three trunks were behind Leopa. The door was beyond the black girl.

Leopa took courage; the rigidity of fright changed back to the tautness of muscles tensed for a spring. The hand sought again the dagger; found it.

Cecilia smiled. It had suddenly dawned on her that she was wasting worry. It was really much better to die than to—

The girl came a step nearer, paused, and listened—another step with another pause. It was as if she would make easier work of murder—shorten the spring to the attack.

Then she straightened suddenly, leaped—but backward, and to a position of as nearly complete repose as one could assume and stand. The reason came to Cecilia—a knock on the door.

"C-c-come!" But Cecilia could not command even a whisper.

The black girl's face might have indicated the superlative of boredom.

"You holler? Be trouble?" a guttural voice called.

Still Cecilia could not produce a vocal sound. The knob of the door began to work softly, tentatively. Then there was a gradual opening, the gray, woolly top of a negro head. Then—

Cecilia almost shrieked again at sight of the ugly, cruel, wicked-leering black face that peered at her from the opening.

Like all Southern women, she was familiar with negroes. She had seen bad ones before. She knew this was a worse one than any she had ever seen. He was worse than the girl with the hate glittering in her eyes.

But she saw that the evil of him was in no manner directed at herself. He was curious, ready even to be helpful, perhaps to call Weeks to straighten things out. He edged into the room.

"The girl has a dagger—a knife," Cecilia stated without any compunction for the very slight uncertainty in her mind about it. "She was about to stab me."

Leopa uttered an amazed cry of outraged innocence. It did her no manner of good. Cecilia had not expected anything like the results she got by her statement. The black preacher's face lighted. His lips spread in a grin that revealed wolfish teeth. It was a facial expression for a medieval painter to catch and put upon a body with horns and hoofs—the look of one who enjoyed hurting things.

And he leaped at Leopa with an agility quite astonishing for his age. She tried to duck, to escape his heavy hand, which descended upon her head with a crushing blow and gripped into the black wool with gnarled black fingers. A mean whine escaped her, as he shook her until the sound was broken into short gasps, until the knife clanged to the floor, until her loose garment had all but gone after it. Then he started toward the door, dragging the girl full length after him.

The sheer brutality of the act, together with the old man's hideously obvious pleasure in it, wrought a complete revulsion in Cecilia's feelings toward Leopa, and she was about to turn on the fellow in hot demand that he desist, when—sharp, cool, incisive—Weeks's voice snapped in the hall as he approached:

"What the devil is this?"

The negro relaxed his grip on the girl's hair. But he did not cringe at all before the white man as he offered his easy explanation:

"Leopa be plenty too much jealous for white—"

"Damn you! Shut your mouth!"

The black man's voice had been raised for all the world to hear, since he would make the deaf man hear. The answer, accompanied by a fierce slap across the ugly black mouth, was delivered in a whisper, as Weeks sprang into the room upon him. Then he turned upon Cecilia the hasty, startled look of a man realizing that he is caught in a mean situation.

And Cecilia, with lips parted and eyes staring, her mind seeming to slip from the

comprehension of the significance of it all—saw a man as mean as the situation. His thin, pinched, pallid features, his slightly protruding pale-blue eyes, under a dome which looked more bald than it was because the hair on it was so light in color—was no longer that of the clean, sportsman-like Englishman who tried to be brave while he played a hard man's game under a heavy handicap, but failed to hide from her woman's eyes his need for sympathy. She wondered what had become of that man.

The creature before her was a picture of calculating, yet sensual selfishness, with no limit; his too thinly covered head and whole face something nakedly indecent. His next acts and words only made him the meaner in her eyes for attempting to bluff out the situation.

"Get out of here!" he snapped at the girl. "No come back! You come back, be plenty flog palaver to kill you. Savvy?"

He did not look at the disgraced black girl as she slowly rose to her feet, but strode past her and farther into the room.

"Might have known better than to let her come around," he explained. "I couldn't find a boy with a voice I could hear. The general run of the traders are such a scoundrelly, conscienceless lot that—well, I suppose she was hoping for a *ju-ju* wedding. She didn't hurt you, did she? I'd have her thrown into the creek if she had."

CHAPTER IX.

WEAKS DROPS THE MASK.

BUT Cecilia had looked at the black girl's slow rise and had seen the look she shot at Weak's back. Also, she had heard what Weak's could not hear—from somewhere in the rear of the residence—the cry of a very young infant. And she saw that the lambent fire of hate had wavered and died from the dark eyes, as they shifted away from Weak's and down the passage where the hunger-cry came.

"Leopa!" Cecilia suddenly called.

Leopa must have caught something of Cecilia's feelings in the voice. Perhaps the old man caught it too—he followed the girl back into the doorway. Weak's had not heard at all, and, stooping to pick up the dagger from the floor, was entirely unaware that she had spoken.

"God!" he was exclaiming, as he examined the deadly weapon. "To think she was like that! Shows just how much we really ever know about the filthy—"

But now he perceived that Cecilia was looking past him. He wheeled. With a fresh flash of rage he started toward the two blacks.

"Stop!" Cecilia's rising anger gave her voice enough to reach his deadened ears. "Leopa!" She uttered the girl's name again, this time for him to hear. "You like *him*?"

The ring of the last pronoun was enough to bring back his gaze to Cecilia's face. The girl stood still in puzzled, sullen silence.

"If you do," Cecilia cried, "take him! I'd rather marry all the snakes in Africa than have him touch me with his finger."

It may have been too much English for either of the negroes, but she had made Weak's hear it. And he had turned back on her a look—well, Cecilia had seen them exhibiting a freak shark in a tank at Tallahassee, one of the white-bellied variety with the white extending up and over its head.

Leopa's eyes had reminded her of those of a rattlesnake. Weak's look now reminded her of that white-faced shark. He came the remaining distance across the room toward her, his eyes blinking as he stared at her. Once or twice she thought he was going to make some fresh attempt at bluff—some plea for a further hearing. Then she saw that he wasn't.

"Peter!" she yelled toward the open window at the top of her voice.

"Ah-h—I think I understand something now!" the thin, white lips before her hissed. "Your American taste has taken rather a fancy to a fellow countryman, eh? And your mind is rather ready to suspect—*suspiciously* ready to suspect, is it

not? Any black wench's dirty insinuations are enough for you.

"No—don't waste your breath trying to call your Texan grizzly. He's still at the far side of the village, with enough noise around him to drown the racket of a bombardment. For all your shouting, he's considerably deafer than I am right now. And I want you to let me hear the answers to some questions pretty soon. You'd better save your voice. I want to know whether—as the policeman says in your American stories—you'll come quietly, or be taken.

"No—not yet. Consider your answer while I do a little more talking. Then you won't have to yell but once.

"Beli, go put your shoes on. I'll want you to marry me in a few moments. No black man preacher is going to marry me with his feet bare. Take Leopa as far as you go, and make her go on plenty too much farther. Savvy?"

The old negro grunted.

"But you stay for residence—no go for beach—no go for store. Stay here! Savvy that bimeby I call."

Another grunt from the black man, and he was on his way. Leopa went with him—quietly.

"Now—I'll talk with you," Weak came back at Cecilia. "Perhaps you'll decide in favor of reason yet. Perhaps you'll give me the worth of the fifty-odd pounds it's cost me to bring you up the river and pay Pete's wages while he was attending to my private affairs. Maybe we'd better stick right to Pete for the moment. He seems to interest you more than I do.

"Has it occurred to you just where Pete stands on this deal? Did you suppose he could bring a woman into this country as his sister, and then have it come out that she wasn't his sister at all—and nothing happen to him? And do you suppose I'm going to let him keep you under my nose without letting it come out?

"You surely can't have the idea that even black preachers are in the habit of marrying brothers to sisters. If I weren't too much interested in a program of my own, I'd really like to know what you

imagine you two can do, how far you can go.

"But I am personally interested in the facts of your case. And those are that, in the sight of the law, you'll be a woman who got herself into this country to come and live with a man by pretending to be his sister.

"And he'll be your accomplice in the eyes of the law. Perhaps you'll enjoy the social distinction that will give you among the white people and even the half-decent niggers. Perhaps you'll not mind being deported back home as a very undesirable alien. Perhaps you'll not mind that your breezy friend will swelter a while in prison for his crime against the regulations. Perhaps that is the sort of thing to suit you. I thought I had some knowledge of your tastes.

"But a woman who is attracted by a man of Winter's unique character is one of whom I cannot possibly predicate what she'll prefer to honorable marriage with the man to whom she has promised her hand. And yet—I am perfectly willing to leave it to you whether you are ready to—come quietly."

He advanced a step closer, his protruding eyes fixed on her, narrowed to ugly slits by lids that stretched over them in half closing, reminding her of the shark's face more than ever.

"You beast!" she screamed. "No—no—no!"

She had slid from the chair and was crouching back away from him toward the remotest corner of the room. He mistook the move for an attempt to reach the window. With one quick step he had reached that and sent it slamming shut, then leaped back to shut off the way to the room's outer door.

Once more he took his stand before her, to make another speech.

"Not yet, eh? Well—so far, I've been talking about the British colonial law. Perhaps it may be well for you to consider that we're quite a distance away from any more of that law than I choose to maintain. Let me tell you something about my law.

"Did I hear you call me a beast just

now? Oh—don't consider my feelings at all about it—I've been called a beast before. Let it go at that.

"You didn't happen, I imagine, to run across any of Peter Winter's predecessors up here. Perhaps nobody told you that he is the first man to have stayed here as my assistant much over a month. Two of them died here in less than that; another died before they could get him out of the country; the rest went home on long furloughs for recuperation.

"Oh, no—I didn't kill them. That's matter of record of investigation, I believe. They just got sick or went off their heads or something—but they went.

"And I've been told they all said I was a beast or worse. I might add that, to my taste, they were, any of them, a lot more of gentlemen than Peter Winter. But Peter Winter has stayed—and I guess he still thinks I am a gentleman. Do you understand why?

"I had use for Peter Winter. *Had*, I say. Maybe you'll understand more fully when I say I haven't had for the last hour. He was an American, and you were an American—and my idea worked itself out all right.

"And now—he has been gone three-quarters of that hour. He went to settle a native scrap the other side of the village. I didn't see that he had the sense even to take his gun.

"Since he's not here to tell you, you'll have to take my word for it that it was the first such fuss that has happened around here in all the time he's been with me. I didn't tell anybody to start it. But—*it happened fifteen minutes after I got through needing Peter!*

"He may come back. I have no desire that he shouldn't. I rather think he will. But—he won't come back until I'm ready for him, and that will be about one hour after our wedding."

She had not straightened as he made this speech—she had slowly slunk to the floor as if its terrible import were crushing her down.

There she sat, at first, staring wildly, like a caged animal seeking escape from the prod of a keeper inside the cage, here,

there, everywhere about the narrow room. As he had rasped out the words her eyes had fixed themselves on his face, studying for some sign that he was building a fabric of colossal lies.

"Now—how about your coming—quietly?" he finished.

A moment longer she studied his face. It told her nothing that she wished to know. She already knew that much of his tale was true.

She could not summon voice to make him hear. She nodded slightly.

He strode to the door, called through it:

"Be all right, Beli. Come now—bring lil book. Marry palaver."

The ugly old preacher shuffled in so quickly that it gave reason to believe he had been playing eavesdropper. He had not even put on his shoes. But Weaks no longer raised objection to his feet. He caught Cecilia's shoulders to lift her to her feet.

She had wondered why the touch of him had seemed to fill her with loathing, why his kiss had been a burning poison on her lips. Now she understood.

He was no longer a patient in a base hospital, among civilized beings, and leashed by civilized laws. He was in Africa now—and could be himself.

CHAPTER X.

A MESSAGE FOR PETER.

AS he got her to her feet, C. Rhodes Weaks dropped one arm to catch Cecilia by the waist. It is quite likely he had no thought other than to support her while the mock ceremony was hurriedly accomplished.

But the effect upon Cecilia's mind was that of the celebrated last straw on the camel's back. She experienced the sensation commonly expressed these days as "seeing red." Actually, every rather gorgeously oriental tint, with which the room had been prepared for her, stood out with its own color seeming to glare into her eyes and dazzle her.

The pallid face of the man looked luridly

white, and the whiteness seemed to spread over the outline of it, like the colors on some inaccurately lithographed map.

It was an experience so entirely outside and different from everything else in her life that she must have been astonished at it, incredulous of it—had there been room in her for more than one thought and one feeling.

And the feeling was one of a fury that thirsted for such horrible things as might have delighted the savage taste of the old trader-chief in parson's dress before her; and the thought was to kill Cecil Weak. In that moment she was more utterly primitive than Leopa could have become; for Leopa had her savage science of doing the things that Cecilia went about with blind, insensate lust to hurt and slay.

Mere instinct doubled her small fist and drove it upward at his face, and only the unexpectedness of it enabled her to land the blow—not at all where she had aimed it, but on the edge of his cheek-bone, near enough the eye to hurt.

Yet blinder instinct must have tried to catch the hair at the back of his head. It was too thin and short to have caught in anything but tweezers. Not finding it, she clawed with her nails, dragging them around his neck, a horrible, inhuman joy tingling in her fingers from the feel of the tearing cuticle.

She was in perfect savage humor for all the other ugly things that civilized people do not do, even in mortal combat. She could have bitten his fingers or his cheek with a relish; she could have gouged with her thumbs in his eyes. She was become solely and entirely incarnate rage. Two or three hundred years back the majority of her ancestors had come from Spain, with Latin blood in their veins. Also—through all this time she had been supporting several degrees of a fever which seldom takes long in inducing a delirium.

But the fight was over—from her end of it.

"You damned, devilish little cat!" shrieked the man in a falsetto of fury as great as her own, and backed with thrice her muscle and a brain that could be wicked and yet think.

In an instant he had caught both arms in a viselike grip that fairly cut the flesh of her wrists. Then he shook her toward and from him. Once—twice—thrice—the terrible wrench of it seemed loosening every bone in her body. She stayed on her feet only because he held her there.

As he shook, he cursed her in squeaks of rage—with all the vile curses the tongues he could speak held in their vocabularies. The filth of the English language mixed with guttural Jackrie and Sobo snarls, with Malay and South Sea words that spell themselves in liquid consonants and vowels and pronounce themselves in coarse grunts. As he held her then, limp and powerless, he turned loose long strings of Arabic vituperation interspersed with the unutterable nastiness of the scum of Europe that lives in the unclean shipping towns of the Mediterranean and the yet more lurid cities on savage coasts to the Far East.

Had Cecilia understood the half of what he said, or even so much of it as she had probably heard before from negro mule-drivers—she must have remained permanently mad with the shame. She was really more absorbed in the fact that he had jerked her toward him and shifted his grip so that he now held her in his arms, fairly blowing his unmeaning billingsgate into her face. And then he addressed himself to the ugly old negro who had stood calmly through the brutal scene, a grim grin of pleasure in it all on his wicked face:

"Beli—nev' mind marry palaver. Go for your house. Bimeby—one, two hour, savvy?—go find Mass' Winter. Speak for him he go for kernel-house. He find white mammy for kernel-house. Maybe he like for see her. Maybe he like for take her for Idda. All same for me—be all right. Savvy? He can have her then. I do not like for keep her—she too much mad."

Through a giddy blackness that came in waves Cecilia saw the old black man fade through the door. The strong arms gripped tighter and tighter. The blackness grew blacker. From far off, to her humming ears, came the rasping voice of the man who was crushing the breath and consciousness from her:

"He can have you. You see—it will be quite safe. Nobody will believe anything against me told by you and the man who brought you in as his sister."

CHAPTER XI.

LEOPA GETS EVEN.

AS Peter caught the collar of the ugly old trader's disguise, he jerked upward with a wrench that finished the buttonholes in collar and neck-band, but left him the tie, which was of the bow variety and made of strong black silk. In this noose he shook the old man hardly less mercilessly than his boss had just shaken Cecilia, while his lips bellowed the query: "What in hell have you been doing?"

He desisted the shaking to give the negro chance to answer.

Old Beli was in condition to confess his blackest sin.

"I no do—no sabby. Be so—be so—Mass' Weaks say you go for kernel-house an' fin' white mammy. Be so—be so—"

"You lie!" Pete shouted. He had just stood beside the kernel-house for no small part of an hour! He gave one backward jerk and then a forward propulsion that drove his fist into the negro's neck. Old Beli sprawled forward, wildly striving to balance himself, hampered by the white man's clothes, which were too tight for his liking, ending with a headlong plunge down the landing-steps into his own waiting canoe.

Pete darted backward to the door of the kernel-house, tried it, found it locked as he had taken for granted all the while. He shouted once—twice—listened. Then he headed for the residence. If Cecilia really was inside there, his key was in his room, anyhow—he had not carried it with him on his journey to the coast.

But of course she wasn't. She was upstairs now, eating her little share of the marriage feast. And the real minister was, perhaps, taking just a sly sip of champagne to toast the bride—had probably sent the old negro on ahead that the little sip should not scandalize the faithful. And he would find out that old Beli was some

sort of local preacher or teacher or something—on Sundays.

This wasn't the first time to-day that he had made an infernal fool of himself. He was making a big mistake by refusing to take quinin as other white men took it here. The climate was getting him.

Anyhow—that Cecilia's pure soul should escape even the suspicion of having liked his uncouth, cowardly abuse of Weaks's trust—it was up to Pete to make some showing of friendly interest in the wedding. He had barely laid out his clothes for dressing. Perhaps he could make a quick sneak through without bothering anybody to notice how he looked until he looked better. He—

Why—where were they all? The house seemed deserted. Was it possible that there had been something more than mere words scared to meaninglessness in what the old man had said of the kernel-house—that she and Weaks had been the victims of some treachery that had got them locked in there?

He started hastily for the hall leading to his own room. Suddenly he halted—had he heard a moan? Shuffling feet—with shoes on them?

He rapped loudly. The shuffling continued; there was no word of answer. He turned the knob of the door.

C. Rhodes Weaks was facing that door. His arms relaxed from their fierce embrace, and the girl's limp form slid downward to the floor in a crumpled heap, past which he had already leaped toward the intruder.

"What in hell is—" He never finished. Pete Winter caught him by the front of the collar in a huge paw that seemed to grip the whole of Weaks's rather protruding Adam's apple. With another huge paw the Texan had snatched at the handier knee of the deaf man. There was a quick movement.

Most of the windows of the upper story had been taken from the smaller building which had constituted the whole station when Weaks first took it over. New paint had not made up for previous ravages of rust during long periods of complete neglect when Suwali was without a white trader.

There was a jingle of glass, a grinding of breaking steel strips. C. Rhodes Weaks landed on the greasy sod below with a thud, and lay very still.

Already Pete Winter was lifting Cecilia in his arms, his lips whispering hoarsely, tremulously—nothing but her name—"Cecilia, Cecilia, Cecilia—" again and again.

"Peter," she whispered back at last.

Suddenly there was all the big, roaring whoop to his voice. "Leopa! Leopa! Bring whisky—no soda—quick!"

The black girl came with the drinks. She looked bewilderedly about the room as she helped Peter get some of the hot liquor to the white girl's mouth. At the first moment she stepped silently to the shattered window and looked down. There was a smile on her face as she turned back to do Pete's next bidding. At last Cecilia came to enough to murmur:

"Peter—oh, take me away from here!"

"I—I reckon I'm going to!" he shouted back. "But—can you stand it?"

"Yes—yes—quick, Peter," she whispered, the urge of fear in her voice. And he realized that her terror of the place must hurt her worse than even the hardships of the long journey to Idda, where there would be facilities for taking care of a sick person.

Gently he picked her up; gently he carried her out, down, across the beach. He selected the sturdiest-looking of the idle canoes and laid her in it.

He ran back up to the residence. Two—three trips he made in the next ten minutes. And almost all the while he could see the canoe from the windows of the upper rooms he visited. He had got her trunks and a few of his own most requisite belongings aboard, also a bottle of brandy and some provisions. Somehow it had not occurred to him to make an effort to secure boys to paddle the canoe.

After all, Africa had turned very much upside down for Peter within a few hours. He was not ready to trust anything in it but himself with the care of Cecilia. But he was not much of a canoeist. Lucky that the canoe was of sturdy size and well fitted with outrigging.

There were fifty miles of up-stream paddling before him. The day had turned into night within half an hour of the beginning of the voyage.

Again and again he ran into the banks, got tangled with overhanging brush, grounded on mud bars. Sometimes it took him long to extricate himself; and the mosquitoes turned his impatience with the delays into frenzy. For he had suffered a touch of fever himself that afternoon. Of the aches the unaccustomed motion produced he was hardly conscious. He had Cecilia.

Occasionally he paused to give her a dose of medicine, to assure himself that she was comfortable as she lay in the bottom of the canoe. It was with difficulty he kept his voice from rising in an Indian whoop when she assured him that she was getting better by the hour.

It was during one of those pauses that he caught the sound of another canoe's paddles, swift, sure—passing well to the farther side of the creek in the same direction as he was going. He might have emptied his pistol at it, had he known the message it was bearing ahead of him to Idda.

Leopa had smiled prematurely. She had gone back to her quarters at the rear of the residence. She, too, was packing to leave.

Suddenly she was startled by her master's voice from the front: "Leopa! Whisky—quick!"

She found Weaks sitting on the floor, where his strength had failed him after getting his shaken self up the stairs. The old slave obedience set her doing what he bade. She helped him to his room and his bed.

"Speak for Dogi—he no drunk—he come for me quick!" commanded the battered agent of Suwali. "Give him for eat for whole night canoe palaver. He go for Idda."

The messenger was her younger brother. She listened to the directions:

"You go for Idda—for Kennedy, the district commissioner—savvy? Good boy. You go quick. You no stop for eat or

drink. You speak for commissioner to-morrow morning. You speak this: White mammy what live for Mass' Winter no be sister for Mass' Winter. You savvy?

"When Cap'n Weaks—yes, me—savvy them mans no be brother and sister, Cap'n Weaks speak for them; they go quick away. He no like that—savvy? And then Mass' Winter—he fight. He throw Cap'n Weaks through window. He kill Cap'n Weaks. Me—I die plenty quick."

He had to repeat this three times before he was sure the boy had learned it sufficiently. Then he lay back and, in spite of his bumps and aches, watched a lizard chase a fly across the ceiling—and grinned. Finally, since he had not been sparing with the brandy, he went to sleep.

Leopa, squatting on the floor outside the room, had grinned, too, as she heard her brother's running orders. It suited her well enough that some trouble should lie ahead for the white mammy. And the big assistant of the trader had kept her scared half to death with the sheer noise of his huge voice.

But that was far from providing complete satisfaction. Slowly Leopa's eyes got back that smoldering fire which had terrified Cecilia a few hours before. But the grin widened on her features, which were like carven ebony. Weaks had not provided her for something. The district commissioner from "gove'ment" would find that no murder had been done—if somebody did not attend to it.

When Weaks's heavy snoring vanquished the last doubt of his sound sleep Leopa crept into his room, silent as a cat. Not even a watch-boy's lantern's feeble ray glinted on the long, narrow blade which she drove down between the left ribs of the sleeping man—down and down, using her fists as hammers on the end of the dagger's hilt—until the metal of the blade's tip rasped against the steel wires of the springs beneath his mattress.

Quite deliberately then the girl took his watch, two rings, a gold cigarette-case, a pearl pin. As deliberately she went about the rooms collecting things that were or seemed to her to be of value. Again in

the rear of the residence she wrapped up quite a bundle in a long, crimson cloth which would serve her again as a gorgeous dress when she needed one. Then she picked up another smaller bundle, that whimpered sleepily as she vanished with it into the brush.

It was Dogi, running with two canoe-men, who passed Winter's canoe about half an hour before daylight, and found the Texan still most of the forenoon away from the last three miles up against the swifter current of the main river.

CHAPTER XII.

PETER IS REMINDED.

CECILIA watched Peter from under a bit of curtain he had managed to rig up where it would shade her face as she lay in the bottom of the canoe. Considering the experiences through which she had passed within thirty hours, she was remarkably comfortable. Peter had treated her for fever, with a fear of weak doses driving him to increase them as few less amateur physicians would have dared. Her condition was a sort of *ex post facto* justification for measures which might just as easily have done more damage than they could cure.

There were bruises on her wrists and joints that would make her wince to move them for days to come. But Peter had very nearly cleaned the Suwali residence of cushions and pillows; and she was without pain as long as she lay still. As a matter of fact, it was hard for her to justify, to a conscience of the peculiar quality of hers, simply lying there and letting him do the work—and the suffering.

For Peter was suffering. He had never in his life paddled a canoe more than two or three miles before. He had long since passed the point where the mere joy of having her with him and doing for her could make him oblivious to the mighty ache which made each stroke a torture. Besides—there was not much more joy coming to him. He was rapidly approaching the end of a necessity which could outweigh other considerations and excuse a

care for her which, barring that necessity, would be but presumption and insult on insult; as every needless attention had become since his mad break in the storm of yesterday.

"Peter, you're terribly tired," she finally remarked.

He looked down at her—it had been all of twenty minutes since he had taken his eyes from the water beside his paddle and put her through a catechism as to her comfort.

"Don't you-all go to bothering about me now," he bade her. "I reckon I'm a lot better off than I deserve to be."

"But—Peter," she went on, "is there such an awful hurry? Why can't you rest a bit? What are you so anxious about?"

"Me?" he queried. "It isn't me. But I reckon you-all have had so much mo' than you want of me—an' him—you got it coming to you to get shut of the last of us the first minute it can be done."

A faint flicker of a smile might have been detected by a man who could have seen over his own imaginary offenses to believe that she could ever smile at him again. But there wasn't much a girl could say to his self-deprecations—without saying too much.

"But, Peter," she finally resumed, "you can't keep that up—or keep me fairly rushing—all the way down to the coast."

"I won't," he said wearily. "Theh's a mission'ry place up the rivah a couple of mile. I guess, maybe, they'll be decent-folks. Anyhow, they'll know when they go too fah befoah they've clean gone."

It was the nearest he ever would come to apologizing for what was beyond any apology. She tried hard to think of something to hint that he might be allowed to present his apologies—but most of those neat conversational tricks that make a person talk about what another person wishes are accomplished by authors with both ends of the talk in their own hands, and plenty of time to write them out.

"Peter," she evolved again, "I'll really have to stop somewhere—before I can go to a missionary's house. This dressing-gown is—permissible, I guess—for a sick

lady with her brother taking care of her. But—I'm really going to walk to that missionary place when we land. And—aren't we more apt to find a place where I could change on the creek than out on the river where there are so many other boats? If you could just land me under that mangotree—it is one, isn't it?—and put that trunk on the bank with me—"

He turned the canoe silently toward the shore. He got out—she thought he would go overboard, he was so stiff in rising. He carried the small trunk she had indicated to a spot behind a considerable growth of shoots. Desert habit had led him to bring drinking water in two canteens.

"You'll have to pour it," he said briefly enough, and took a canteen back to the trunk. Cecilia waited for his return, making no further move to get out of the canoe, beyond that she had already sat up. When he came she began—and accomplished an excellent imitation of inability to rise.

She felt more than half guilty when he stooped to lift her—with a look of blank impersonalness on his face hardly inferior to that of a well-broken coachman. Lifting her must really have hurt his aching arms more than it would have hurt her. But time was short, if he was planning to leave her in Idda.

He carried her to the trunk and the canteen.

"Can you stand now?" he asked.

"I—I think so—oh, yes—you're awfully good," she said.

He turned away hurriedly and got back into the canoe and paddled up-stream a few yards.

"I'm ready now, Peter," she called to him presently. He was back in a moment. She had closed the trunk and was sitting on it calmly as he approached. She did not even lift her hands to indicate that he should take her again.

"Peter—this mango-tree—it isn't really the one we stopped under yesterday in the storm, is it?" In spite of the fact that her eyes were centered on the trunk of the tree, she saw that he started perceptibly.

"Why—why, no. That one was—"

"I didn't really think it was," she cut

in. "I think this is a nicer mango-tree than the other, don't you?"

"Why—why—" He was staring at her in puzzled amazement now. He couldn't imagine that she should really want to talk to him now. That she should want to talk utter nonsense—there must be something coming. There was—

"Peter," she said with sudden severity—"you did go too far yesterday."

His eyes fell. He looked vastly younger than at his most boyish moment heretofore. To be precise, he looked like a child caught in such utter naughtiness as precludes all hope of clemency. Cecilia swallowed hard to keep down a laugh at him.

"I think," she went on—"that you completely forgot that I was engaged to be married within about two hours."

"Oh," he groaned—"I reckon I forgot about everything."

"Are—are you always so forgetful?" she inquired. "I—I didn't know but I could forgive you for forgetting once, if you'd be sure always to remember hereafter—and I might let you take me back down to the coast."

"Oh, say—I'll remember—I reckon I'd remember where I was and what's what forever—if you— Say, sis, I feel just like giving one regular whoop."

"But—you're forgetting right away."

"I—I—what?" he gasped, consternation obliterating everything that looked like a whoop from his face.

"You're forgetting that—that I'm not engaged any more. And I do believe," she went on almost sharply, "that you've forgotten entirely that this is leap year; and, that if you can't say anything—I can."

Maybe she hurt her lip when she bit it. It was quivering a little.

But Peter said something. Some people might have thought it was profane; it was really much nearer a prayer of thankful awe and wonder:

"Gawd!mighty!"

"Peter," she complained some fifteen minutes later, when his paddle was working as if he'd just got up from a long sleep that finished a period of training for a canoe race—"you don't have to hurry so now."

"Don't I?" he retorted. "I'll say I've got one mighty big palaver with a mission man a whole heap quicker than I can ever get to him."

He put another mile behind them—they were nearly to the mouth of the creek which, like all the other backward things in the Delta country, had its source in its mouth.

"Peter," she began again, "I thought you were going to give that regular whoop."

He stopped paddling, and drew a long breath.

"I can't, sis—I can't," he said huskily, as the breath came from him in a trembling wheeze. "There a' some things so almighty big—I haven't got voice to whoop up to them."

But the next time he spoke it was not at one of those promptings Cecilia was giving for the sheer joy of listening to his voice.

They had turned now into the broad river. A steamboat, forming, in its contrast with the dismal bush of the river's bank, another of the usual African incongruities of civilization rubbing elbows with savagery—had left them bobbing in its wake. Up on the stern of the boat two young men with white helmets and European attire were still exposing their too white complexions to the sun to wave those helmets in friendly greeting.

"Say, sis—Cecilia—I bet we'ah going to have a whole lot of trouble getting married. If those two young idiots have half an hour up yondah in Idda, to tell that we'ah brotheh and sistuh—it 'll be more'n trouble."

Which indicated that his prevision was working better than his memory.

CHAPTER XIII.

PETER GOES LAWLESS.

REALLY, there is nothing like that joy-cure. When Peter finally got the canoe fastened alongside a mission launch and helped Cecilia across this and up the steps of the landing at the mission beach—it would have been hard for any

one to detect that either of them was very stiff or very tired or had come anywhere near being sick within weeks.

The Idda mission beach adjoins the grounds of a big barracks for native military police. On the parade ground before it a natty little company of Yoruba soldiers were going through a drill under the supervision of Lieutenant Garley. They were well drilled. The young lieutenant was proud of those Yoruba boys. Generally they justified his pride. Anyhow, they were experts at meeting all the ordinary kinds of fighting their duties were apt to provide.

In a corner of the parade grounds, clear across, where it adjoined the premises of the commission, a Sobo boy squatted, idly watching the exhibition—probably awakening within himself an ambition for a military career.

The two weary white people did not notice the Sobo boy. But the Sobo boy noticed the two white people—stared a moment after them as they hurried toward the steps of the mission house veranda.

His name was Dogi.

The only other person known to have noticed the approach of the eager pair was the Rev. James M. Burns, D. D., M. D. However, it is unlikely that a white woman went up that beach unnoticed by many eyes with windows or other outlook toward the mission. Certainly the missionary was astonished enough to go to the door himself. But he had recovered enough from his astonishment to meet them with a greeting which crushed no little hope in their breasts.

"Oh, howdy-do! You're Mr. Winter and the sister who has set us all off about the way she's come to this country to take care of him. But I thought you'd already gone up to Suwali—or, did you find that a little too much of a job for you?"

Peter had been debating for two hours just what he would do if this particular missionary had already heard that they were hopelessly within the limits of consanguinity. Some of the time he had debated with himself; some of it with Cecilia.

When he had debated with himself, he

had decided to give up and head right down the river, and stay Cecilia's brother until they were out of range of certain impeding laws. When he had debated with Cecilia, he had concluded to rest an hour at the mission, then take the canoe and start up-river, to keep on paddling until he had outrun the knowledge of his alleged relationship to his fair companion, if he had to go clear through to the last mission station on Lake Tchad.

The one thing both of them had decided not to do was to correct the story they had already given out. They might find themselves in all sorts of trouble. And it might be trouble that would separate them. Which was something that could not be even risked.

Then they looked at the Rev. James M. Burns, D. D., M. D.

"Doctor, I'd—I'd like to tell you something about that," Pete stammered. "You see—we're—"

"We're not brother and sister at all, doctor," Cecilia spoke more confidently.

Peter had thought that the missionary looked like a human he-man. A woman can always tell more about such things—or nearly always. Cecilia *knew*.

"You see, I was engaged to be married to Mr. Weaks," she added hastily, since the clergyman seemed a bit aghast at the information she had just imparted.

"Ah-h!"

"And—he wanted me to come out here," Cecilia rushed on. "And he arranged for me to come out as Peter's—Mr. Winter's sister."

Dr. Burns's face looked studious for a moment—and relaxed, as if he were heading toward belief that the thing might be true.

"You *were* both Americans," he supplied as an argument toward that belief. "And—and—" What he swallowed back was a statement to the effect that the whole coast was prepared to believe anything of Peter Winter, or anything he might have in the way of a sister. "Weaks is a clever beast," he acknowledged instead.

"And—I fell fo' it," Peter said by way of getting back into a conversation which

rightly belonged to him. "I thought he was a friend of mine."

"But how did you find out?" queried the minister.

"Find out about what?" Peter queried back.

"The other two wives," said Dr. James M. Burns.

"Gawd'lmigh—excuse me!" gasped Peter.

"Two!" gasped Cecilia. "I found out only about the one."

"Which one?" demanded the bewildered parson.

"The girl he called Leopa," Cecilia explained.

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed the parson. "That must be the third!"

"And all I did to him was to throw him out of the window!" Peter mourned regretfully. "If I'd known that—"

"It's a pity you didn't," snapped the servant of the Lord.

"And now—we want you to marry us, afore the government finds out she hasn't any business being heah," Peter got to the real point.

"H-m!"

Peter and Cecilia both looked at each other. Things had been going so smoothly that they were surprised at any hesitation.

Dr. Burns turned his eyes on Peter.

"Don't you think it would be better to let her go back home? It's not likely anything about this will travel that far. And—you don't look to me like the kind of man who would want to keep a white woman in this climate."

"I'm not going to keep her here—we'ah both going out together," Pete explained.

"But—is your contract up?" asked the missionary.

"My contract?" Peter had thought very little of his contract in the last two hours.

"If a man desires to throw one contract to the winds, how am I to know he'll live up to one I help him to make?" the clergyman inquired. "I think I appreciate that you want to spare the lady any unpleasantness beyond that she has already endured. But—"

"I'll stay!" cried Cecilia. "I came out here to take care of— No, I can't call him a man, and then call Peter one."

"H-m! Possibly you don't think my concern about you need extend beyond the completion of the marriage ceremony. I don't know as it's really my business what you do. The lady says you'll stay. Of course, there's your contract. If I were doing it myself, I—"

"Oh, you don't have to have my advice about that." But they had it. There was just a faint twitching of his pale lips: "And here comes Lieutenant Garley, exercising his Yoruba boys. I'm not married myself; but perhaps we can persuade him to stop and provide a white witness and a little military éclat to the event. Lieutenant!"

But he need not have called the lieutenant. That soldier man was coming at the double-quick—and there was a right-about directly in front of the mission veranda—and—

"Thanks, doctor—for holding 'them," panted the officer. "It's really too hot to run far this morning."

"What—what's this?"

Nobody understood.

"They're not brother and sister at all," said the officer.

"They were just telling me so," mildly responded the preacher.

"They were?" The lieutenant gasped now.

"And I was just calling you to come in and see a wedding that would make everything all right, even though it hasn't been so before."

They all looked at the lieutenant expectantly. He could hardly make trouble over so meager a technicality as would be left of the breach of the regulations.

"Sorry, Dr. Burns—but a wedding will hardly make everything all right now. These two are under arrest."

And right there a natty little Yoruba orderly made a terrible mistake. Of course nobody ought to have expected a Yoruba boy to know much but bush fighting. He laid his hand on Cecilia Baldwin's arm.

There were twenty of those Yoruba boys. They were armed with rifles—not

the weapon they would choose for close-in fighting. And the rifles were not tipped with bayonets.

And Peter Winter, who had been showing Africa new things for much the larger part of a year, gave it a lesson in a new style of battle with soldier police. He began on the neat little orderly who had made the mistake.

It was not a fist that caught the orderly's nose and cheeks and mouth all at once—it was the flat palm of a huge hand. And he barely saved himself from sudden death in collision with one of the veranda's pillars and managed to land on the softer beach.

He lost about twenty seconds in getting himself back to his feet. Before he had accomplished that, he had been reenforced by nineteen of his comrades. Game little boys—but too little!

They hadn't even room to use their guns for clubs, and most of them dropped the rifles as they leaped at the big white felon. And Peter hurled one of them into the others, knocked a fourth all over five. His big arms were swinging like flails at one moment—at the next they were lifting a Yoruba boy apiece.

Once they almost had him down; the next second the air seemed full of them, and he was standing on both feet again. Falls did not seem to damage them much; they bounced up and came on again. And again Peter knocked them out.

And, also, one by one they were staying knocked out.

Cecilia stood screaming at him to stop. Dr. Burns made several attempts to get far enough into the mêlée to lay a detaining hand on him. Lieutenant Garley had whipped out his pistol, and was waiting for a chance to shoot that would not be a better chance of hitting one of his own men than the huge American.

There were ten little Yoruba boys sprawled on the ground in such absurd attitudes as one sees sometimes in a prize ring, assumed by an athlete whose ambitions have been temporarily checked off with a K. O. against them. The other ten were still disentangling themselves from a heap when Garley's pistol spoke.

The noise of it—Garley scored a perfect miss—brought Peter back just a shade of reason.

He put up his hands.

"Suah—you don't need to shoot me up! I'll come along quiet enough. But you keep them little niggahs' hands offen huh—or I just nachally won't be responsible," he growled.

"You're devilish particular about her," snapped the lieutenant, "for a man that's just killed a respectable white person who refused to let the pair of you live together under his roof."

"What? Who?"

There was more than one voice to the exclamatory inquiring; but Peter's voice drowned the others.

"Mr. Weeks is dead—this man killed him," the officer informed the clergyman. "Halt!" He stopped his soldiers. "I've got the bully now."

"Dead! Killed! Why, I only threw him out of a window. I nevah could even hu't a rattlesnake doing that; and he was worse 'n any rattler. Say, lieutenant—who said he's dead?"

Dogi had followed the results of the information he had imparted to the lieutenant so closely that no one had seen him over the heads of the soldiers.

Garley called him forward. "Boy! Come here!"

Dogi came eagerly.

"Dogi!" Peter exclaimed in recognition.

Dogi changed his mind about wanting to be a soldier for the government. He changed his mind about wanting to impart information.

"Stop him!" Dogi came back. He might have broken from the battered pair of soldiers who held him, perhaps. He did not try very hard.

"Say—who told you Cap'n Weeks was killed?" the soldier demanded. He had heard rumors of the murder brought in from the district commissioner's office next door, until Dogi had rushed up to inform him that the murderers were right within grasp. His credulity had been a little shaken by Winter's unmistakable amazement.

But Dogi was eying Peter fearfully, and had gone silent as the tomb.

"Come on, sonny—I want to know," Peter tried to encourage his speech.

"I won't let the big white beast hurt you," snapped the lieutenant. He had just noted a particularly ugly cut over the eye of a favorite member of his company. "See—I shoot plenty quick."

The boy got well behind the shelter of the officer and his gun. Then he turned defiant on Peter Winter.

"*Yaw!* So be—me speak," he asserted strongly. "Cap'n Weak he done speak fo' me hisself. He speak, me come too quick for Idda—for white man com—commish'ner white man—and speak for commish'ner white man what me speak true. Mass' Winter no be brother fo' white mammy; Cap'n Weak' done speak for them two man they go."

"Be so. Cap'n Weak' done speak fo' me hisself, 'You speak for commish'ner white man Mass' Winter done kill me.' So be—Cap'n Weak' done speak true."

"But—good Lord!" gasped the lieutenant. "Where was Cap'n Weaks?"

"He be for sleep in his bed. He be sick too much. He drink one, two, three time whisky."

It was almost a month later that anybody down the river knew that murder had really been done. The man who finally ascertained that fact was of long experience in Africa. He knew a white man's job from the work of a native. Besides, by that time— But wait a moment.

"Anyhow," Lieutenant Garley finally grumbled, "I'm not going to let any bally big bull buffalo batter up half a company of the best of my boys and get off with it. You're under arrest just the same."

"Lieutenant!" He wheeled sharply—and found himself facing a charming woman of whom he had just learned from the missionary that she was not at all the kind who might be expected to try to smuggle herself into Africa very often. He had not faced a charming woman in a long time.

"Lieutenant—you know—he did it on my account. You see he—he's been a very good brother to me. And now— Well, you know he's really from the States; and

it's different there, I guess. We don't—not in my part of the States—or his—let black people lay hands on white women—not and live long afterward."

"Neither do we." The lieutenant turned red to the roots of his hair.

"And—so I was wondering—if you'd use your influence to see that he was punished by deportation. Or maybe you'd let him go voluntarily. That is—if I invited you to the wedding. We'd be awful glad to have you. I'll even let you take his place as my brother and give me away. Now!"

The lieutenant turned redder. "And—does the brother have the privilege, after the ceremony, of—of—"

He lost his nerve. This was not his kind of a fight.

"Nice brothers do," she murmured, dropping her eyes.

Twenty minutes later they all adjourned to the office of the district commissioner. The D. C. was forty—more susceptible than most lieutenants of four and twenty.

"If this wasn't such a damnable climate for a white woman, I'd deport you for taking your wife out of it," he pronounced about all the sentence he seemed to think necessary after Dr. Burns had exhibited a certain letter concerning which he had had an unfinished correspondence with C. Rhodes Weaks. "But if you'll go voluntarily, I'll let it stand that way."

"And that," Cecilia cried triumphantly, "settles the old contract. Now—we won't have to stay in this old Africa. Peter—we'll just go home—and go West."

The D. C. seemed loath to let them depart. There might have been even a hint for an invitation in his remark:

"I've often wondered what your West is like."

He got a sample two minutes later. Peter, down on the beach, headed for the wharf where the steamboat lay taking on the last forty barrels of kernels for Forcados or Akassa, stopped, lifted his head to the dazzling heat of Africa's sun, and—

"*Wa-wa-wa-wa-wa — whoo-oo-pee!*" he woke the echoes of the town and the bush for a mile with an Indian yell.

(The end.)

Listening Eyes

by Bertram Lebhar

Author of "Thumbs Down," "A Nurse Named Allenby," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A UNIQUE advertisement for a deaf stenographer offered to the New York *Mercury* suggested investigation and Cecilie Harvey, a newcomer to the editorial staff, was assigned to cover the case for a "story." She decided to apply for the post herself, pretending to be deaf and a lip-reader. Gordon Hemment, star reporter, who took a particular interest in the girl even though somewhat stunned by her sudden announcement of her engagement to Ethan Underwood, coached her a bit and eagerly awaited her reports each night at the *Mercury* office. She was unable, however, to fathom the reason for her engagement by the Gotham Development Company until one afternoon she was asked to apply field-glasses to two holes in the window-shade and report to Mr. Wrigley what two men in an office across the narrow street were saying. One of these men was Underwood. She promptly refused to do what was asked of her and hurried across the street to apprise her fiancé that he as being spied upon. Meanwhile Hemment became worried when she did not return to report as usual and then was shocked to learn that Wrigley had been found dead in his office with a knotted cord around his neck. He visited Underwood, who denied that he was engaged to Cecilie and requested that no mention be made of why she had been employed across the way. Meanwhile, from an unsupplied address the girl sent in her resignation, and in a note to Hemment begged that he would print nothing about the reason why she went to work for the dead man.

CHAPTER XII.

OG LIVIE FINDS GILDER.

FOR six days in succession Deputy Police Commissioner Oglivie informed the newspapermen who came to his office at headquarters that there were no new developments in the "Interborough Building murder case." In spite of his reputation for frankness and independence the disappointed scribes began to suspect that the chief of the Central Office bureau had finally succumbed to the "gag rule" policy of a hostile municipal administration which, because of divers and sundry uncomplimentary remarks on editorial pages—with which, of course, they had nothing whatever to do—was determined to throw all the obstacles it could in the path of the news-gatherers.

As a matter of fact, however, Oglivie was merely telling them a truth that each successive day was becoming more and more a source of humiliation and chagrin to himself. So far as he and his organization

were concerned there really were no new developments in this mystery which was causing him more perplexity than any other problem in crime he had ever delved into in the course of his long and shining career as a professional investigator. Either the luck was against them or the detective branch of the Metropolitan police department was not functioning properly.

For six days and nights a picked squad of the best sleuths on the deputy commissioner's staff had been hunting in vain in the mazes of the underworld for some shred of information concerning the identity of the person or persons who were responsible for the violent death of the man known as Howard Parsons Wrigley. That it was an underworld affair Oglivie had now fully made up his mind. The prison-past of the victim, the manner in which the crime had been perpetrated, and the words which Wrigley's office boy had heard him utter just before his death—"You can't bluff me! I am not afraid to tell you that I am out to get you, and I am going to do it!"

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for January 1.

--all these circumstances pointed in Oglivie's opinion to the conclusion that the murder was the outcome of a feud between professional criminals. No amateur in crime, his experience and detective instincts told him, had done this thing.

But all their channels of communication with the underworld—which had served them in good stead in many other notable instances—had failed the deputy commissioner and his men thus far in their efforts to fathom the depths of this mystery. They were not even "marking time" on the case, the police official told himself and his subordinates disgustedly—they were going backwards. Six whole days had gone by, and they had not even succeeded in getting on the track of the dead man's deaf stenographer—the mysterious young woman who had taken dictation from Wrigley by reading his lips. Perhaps she played no important part in the case, but at all events Oglivie was chagrined by his inability to run her to cover and find out what she knew.

On the morning of the seventh day, however, the situation seemed to brighten a bit. At eleven o'clock two Central Office men marched into their chief's presence escorting between them a stout, glum-faced man who evidently was not a willing visitor.

"Boss," one of the detectives announced, with a triumphant grin. "Here's a gentleman we rather think you'll enjoy having a talk with. His name is Gilder. He was Wrigley's partner."

Oglivie's face lighted up. "Mr. Benjamin Franklin Gilder—alias Benny Gersten, this is indeed a pleasure," quoth he. "Good work, boys! How did you connect with him?"

Picked him up at the Pennsylvania station, a quarter of an hour ago, just as he was stepping off a train, chief. Guess he must have got tired of hiding in the bushes, and fell for the lure of the white lights."

The deputy police commissioner grinned. "It's hard to keep away from Broadway, isn't it, Benny?" he chuckled. "Sit down, old timer, and make yourself comfortable. And don't look so scared. We're not going to hurt you."

"I'm not scared," the president of the Gotham Development Company responded

sullenly, as he availed himself of the invitation. "You have got nothing on me."

His last remark was intended for a defiant statement of fact, but it sounded very much like an anxious interrogation.

"Nothing on you! Of course not. Nothing at all," Oglivie rejoined, pleasantly. "This is just a friendly little visit." He opened a drawer of his desk and produced a box of cigars. "Have a smoke, Benny. I don't know whether these are as good a brand as you've been accustomed to since you went into the real estate business, but I think you'll find them pretty fair."

Gilder sulkily waved away the proffered box. He wasn't in a sociable mood. His pudgy, moon-like countenance continued to hold an expression of mingled woe and apprehension. Inwardly he was cursing the mistake in judgment which had brought him back to New York. It was not the lure of the white lights which had caused him to walk into this trap. He had the fondness of his kind for Broadway, to be sure, and in other circumstances would have preferred the night life of the Tenderloin to the tedious environment of the "hick town" in which he had been sojourning recently in strict *incognito*; but it was not this preference which had landed him in his present predicament.

It had looked to him like a good strategic move to return to the metropolis. He had succeeded in giving the slip to the post-office inspectors who, he knew, had been camping on his trail, but he realized that they were still hunting for him, and that the arm of the United States secret service is a long one and usually succeeds in grasping what it reaches out for. New York, it had seemed to him, would be a better hiding place than the obscure Pennsylvania hamlet in which he had taken temporary refuge. Was it not an axiom of his world that a big city offers the greatest amount of security to a fugitive? And the very daring of his move would be enough to throw his pursuers off the scent. They would be watching for him in every other metropolis, but they would not expect him to beat it back to Manhattan Island. That would be the last thing they would figure on his doing. So he had thought.

But now he realized that he had guessed wrong. That truth had burst painfully upon his consciousness when the two Central Office sleuths had stepped up to him in the concourse of the big Seventh Avenue railroad terminal, and politely invited him to take a little taxicab ride with them.

The discovery that these men who had "picked him up" were not in the Federal service, and therefore could not be directly interested in the Gotham Development Company's misuse of the mails, did not afford him any comfort. He was well aware that the local police and the national secret service often worked hand in hand. He guessed why he had been brought to police headquarters first, but there was no doubt in his mind that eventually—when Oglivie was through with him—he would be handed over to the United States authorities.

"What do you want of me?" he snarled. "Cut out the kidding, commissioner; and get down to business. Is this a pinch? If it is I demand to see the warrant. And I refuse to talk until I've had a chance to engage counsel. I stand on my constitutional rights."

"What is the Constitution between friends, Benny?" Oglivie quoted, with a laugh. "I tell you this is going to be nothing but a friendly little talk. Forget about lawyers and warrants, and come across with all that you know about the murder of Wrigley. That's what you're here for."

"I don't know anything about it," Gilder protested. "If you're trying to hang that murder on me you're wasting your time. I was out of the city when it happened. I've got an alibi."

"Of course. We know very well that you didn't croak your partner. We have no intention of trying to hang that job on you. But you know who did it, Gersten, and why it was done. That's what we want you to tell us."

"You're wrong, commissioner. I don't know a thing about it. Not a thing. How should I know? I was out of town when it happened, and—"

"You were out of town. That lets you out. But you're wise to who did it," the police official cut in impatiently. Don't

try to tell us that you're not. We know better."

Oglivie leaned forward in his chair. "See here, Benny!" he went on persuasively. "Let's come to an understanding before we go any further. Of course you realize what you'll be up against—when we hand you over to the post-office people. Your goose is cooked. You know that. With the evidence they've got against you, and your prison record, you're due for a good long stretch in Atlanta. It'll be no five-year bit, this time, you can be sure; and you haven't a ghost of a show of beating the case."

"Now, I'm willing to make a bargain with you, Benny. You know me. At least, you know that I've got the reputation of being square—of always delivering the goods when I make a promise—and you are aware also, no doubt, that I have something of a pull with the Department of Justice. Now, I can't promise to get you off scot free, but, if you'll come across with all that you know about this murder—tell us who croaked your pal and why it was done—I'll undertake to make it my business to see that you're let down easy when your case comes up for trial. That's fair enough, isn't it? I'm offering you a big chance, and if you don't grab it you'll be a much bigger fool than you look."

It was evident that the fellow was moved by this argument. For a moment an eager light shone in his beady eyes, and his face was a battle-ground of conflicting emotions. Then the light died out; he screwed up his lips and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, commissioner, but I've got nothing to tell. I don't know a thing about it."

The police official shrugged his shoulders.

"Seen Lestrade lately, Ben?" he asked abruptly.

"Lestrade?" echoed Gilder, starting violently.

"Alton Lestrade—the man who was responsible for you and Wrigley being sent up before," Oglivie elucidated. "'Duke' Lestrade, your old pal who squealed on you and turned State's evidence! How long ago since you last saw or heard from him, Gersten?"

Mr. Benjamin Franklin Gilder, alias Benny Gersten, laughed nervously.

"What are you trying to do, commissioner? You know very well that Lestrade has been dead for years. Wasn't he one of the victims of the Titanic disaster—the ship which struck an iceberg off Newfoundland?"

"He was supposed to have gone down with the Titanic; but in disasters of that character one can never be sure about the identification of victims. There is always a certain amount of room for doubt." With dramatic suddenness Oglivie jumped to his feet and stood towering over the prisoner. "Wasn't it Lestrade who killed your partner?" he shouted.

It was merely a chance shot. If the testimony of Johnny Kelly, the Gotham Development Company's office boy, was to be believed, Wrigley had died with a threat on his lips—a threat of vengeance against his mysterious visitor. Oglivie believed that it was to prevent that threat from being carried out that the murder had been perpetrated. Proceeding on this theory he had been delving as deeply as he could into the victim's past in the hope of bringing to light some person against whom Wrigley had reasons for bearing a grudge. In that connection the name of Alton, alias "Duke" Lestrade—the man whose testimony had convicted his two accomplices in the fake oil promotion scheme, would have been worth considering, if it hadn't been for the fact that he was supposed to have been drowned at sea several years ago.

But was Lestrade really dead? True, his name had appeared on the list of more than one thousand victims of one of the greatest catastrophes in the history of ocean navigation. But, as the deputy police commissioner had just remarked, mistakes in identification were not unusual in marine disasters of that kind.

"Wasn't it Lestrade who croaked Wrigley?" Oglivie repeated, watching Gilder's face narrowly to see what effect the suggestion had on him. The result was so disappointing that the detective was almost convinced that there was nothing in this "hunch" of his.

"If Lestrade is alive it is news to me,"

the fellow declared, with every appearance of sincerity. "Why, hang it all, commissioner! If that skunk did it, and I was wise, don't you suppose I'd tell willingly enough? Heaven knows he's about the last person in the world I'd want to see get away with it!"

"I should think so—after the bad turn he did you. But you might be afraid to squeal. I understand that the 'duke' had the reputation of being a pretty bad actor—a dangerous man to have for an enemy. If it's that which is scaring you into holding back, Benny, I can assure you—"

"I'm not—I wouldn't be afraid," Gilder interrupted. "If I knew, I'd come across. I'd be mighty glad to do it. Poor 'Finny' was the best pal I ever had, and I take a chance any time to see that the guy who croaked him gets what is coming to him."

He spoke with such earnestness that the chief of the Central Office was favorably impressed, although, of course, the latter did not fail to take into account the fact that he was dealing with a man who for years had been earning his bread and butter by his skill in the art of dissimulation.

"All right, then," said Oglivie, resuming his seat and his former serenity of manner. "We'll forget about Lestrade for a while. Let's hear what you know about your pal's personal affairs, Benny. Of course he had enemies—all of us have. Can you suggest anybody in particular who might, in your opinion, have had a reason for taking his life?"

The president of the Gotham Development Company had nothing to contribute along those lines except the suggestion that possibly some violent-tempered client of the concern had adopted that desperate method of registering his dissatisfaction with the building lot certificates he had purchased.

"Sometimes our customers do—er—act unreasonable, you know, commissioner," he remarked deplorably.

The police official shook his head. "No; it wasn't a customer," he declared. "A sucker looking for satisfaction wouldn't have been able to get into the private office without going through the main room first. This visitor was some one whom

Wrigley knew, and was probably expecting. The fact that he unlocked the door for him shows that." He paused. "By the way, Gilder, what were you fellows doing with a deaf stenographer?"

"A—a deaf stenographer!" the little, fat man stammered, momentarily thrown out of poise by the question. "We—I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, you do. You had a young woman, named Miss Harvey, working in your private office. She was as deaf as a post, and took dictation by reading your lips. What was the idea of that stunt?"

"Oh, her!" said Gilder nervously. "We—I don't know that there was any idea in particular. My partner hired her, a couple of days before I went out of town. He—er—needed a private secretary, and he—er—was sort of taken by her looks. She was a very attractive young woman, and when she convinced Wrigley that in spite of her affliction she could do the work almost as satisfactorily as a girl of normal hearing, he decided to give her a chance."

"Hm!" grunted Oglivie, with a dubious frown. "How did you get her? Through an advertisement?"

"No, sir; she dropped into the office, looking for work, and she just happened to hit us at the psychological moment when we had a vacancy," the fellow lied.

"You don't happen to recall her home address?"

"I never knew it, commissioner. I didn't pay much attention to her myself. She was Wrigley's employe, not mine."

The detective was not entirely satisfied with these answers. From the man's manner he divined that there was more to this incident of the deaf stenographer than Gilder was disposed to tell. He dropped the subject, and took up another line.

For more than an hour he proceeded to cross-examine Wrigley's partner, pressing him so hard that the sweat was soon rolling down the latter's face, and he squirmed in his chair as though he were sitting on thorns. But in spite of these evidences of discomfort on the part of his victim, Oglivie's skill as a cross-examiner did not enable him to achieve results of any great importance.

At length, wearily, and with a scowl of chagrin, the deputy police commissioner picked up his desk telephone and got in communication with his friend, Inspector Thomas Morrissey, of the postal service.

"Are you still interested in Mr. Benjamin Franklin Gilder, president of the Gotham Development Company, Tom?" he asked. "If so, you can come right over and get him. He's sitting in my office now."

The post-office inspector lost no time in availing himself of this invitation. Fifteen minutes later Wrigley's glum-faced partner was taking another taxicab ride. And before that day was over he found himself going through the somewhat unpleasant experience of being arraigned before a United States commissioner on a charge of using the mails with intent to defraud.

He was relieved to find, however, that the bail demanded of him was not excessive—so unexpectedly moderate, in fact, that he was inclined to think that his honor must have taken a fancy to him. Of course he had no means of knowing that this arrangement was the result of a secret understanding between Oglivie and Inspector Morrissey.

"I wish you would fix it so that he won't have any difficulty in getting out on bail, Tom," the deputy police commissioner had said. "We're satisfied that he knows a great deal more about that murder than he's willing to spout, and if he's given a little rope I have a hunch that he'll lead us to what we want. I'll promise you that there'll be no danger of his skipping. My men will take care of that."

Thus it came about that the prisoner was able to furnish a bondsman who met with the approval of the court, and he was soon out of custody again.

"And that's the last they'll ever see of me—if I have any luck," he confided to this friend who had bailed him out. "There's a boat leaving for South America the day after to-morrow, and I have an idea that a sea voyage would be good for my health, Sam. Of course you won't be out a cent, old pal. I shall settle with you in cash before I skip, and tag on a substantial bonus besides."

He did not carry out these plans, however. At three o'clock that night Deputy Commissioner Oglivie was aroused from his slumbers by the shrill call of the telephone beside his bed. When he picked up the instrument and demanded who was calling, he learned that Bourke, one of the men he had assigned to shadow Gilder since his release, was at the other end of the wire.

"Got some bad news for you, chief," the plain clothes man reported. "I'm sorry to have to tell you that they've got our man."

"Got him?" Oglivie exclaimed, sleepily. "What do you mean?"

"Gilder's been croaked, boss. He was found dying in his room at the hotel, fifteen minutes ago, with a knife stuck between his shoulder blades. He cashed in before we could get an ambulance on the job, and without regaining consciousness."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRUTH WILL OUT.

GILDER had registered at the Battery Hotel, a cheap, down-town resort in the vicinity of the water front, at eight that evening. He was unaware that he was still under espionage—or, at least, if not totally oblivious of the fact, he had no more than a faint suspicion that he was being shadowed by Oglivie's men—and he hoped that by seeking accommodations in this obscure and unpretentious place, and taking the further precaution of registering under an assumed name, he would be able to keep "under cover" until the moment came for him to step aboard the boat which was to convey him to the comparative security of a South American port.

He went up to his room immediately after he had signed the book, and that was the last seen or heard of him until shortly before 3 A.M., when a guest in the adjoining room heard some one groaning, and notified the hotel clerk, with the result that Central Office detectives Bourke and Kelliher made the startling discovery that their quarry had been fatally attacked almost under their noses.

"We had taken a room on the same floor, so that we could keep an eye on him,

boss," the discomfited sleuths told Oglivie, when he arrived on the scene. "We couldn't get one right next door, but we were only a few feet away, and naturally we supposed that was near enough for our purpose. And yet this mysterious bird manages to sneak in and knife him in his bed, and make his getaway, without our hearing a sound of what was going on. He must have come and gone by the window, of course; for the door was locked on the inside, and we had to break it in when the alarm was given."

Oglivie examined the window of the room. There was no doubt that Gilder's assailant had used it both for his entrance and exit, for the sash was doubled, and there was a fire-escape which led down to an alley in the rear of the building. That part of the mystery seemed clear enough.

The deputy police commissioner turned his attention to the grim figure stretched on the bed.

"Knifed in the back, eh!" he muttered, thoughtfully. "Probably slept face downwards, and was attacked as he lay in that position, before he even had a chance to turn around and see who his visitor was."

An examination of the man in the adjoining room, who had given the alarm, seemed to bear out this theory. He had heard the victim snoring almost up to the moment of the tragedy, he declared, and he had not heard a word pass between the intruder and Gilder. Moreover, the knife, an ugly-looking implement with a long, wide blade, had been thrust clean through the bed-covering. All the indications were that the assassin had struck swiftly and silently the instant he had effected his stealthy entrance into the room.

Oglivie believed he could guess, too, the motive for this crime. That it was a direct outcome of the affair which had been engaging his attention for the past six days there was scarcely a doubt in his mind. Perhaps the unhappy Gilder had not been struck down by the same hand which had put his partner out of the way, but there was good reason to assume that the author of this tragedy bore a close relationship to the perpetrator of the earlier outrage. In fact, the police official was inclined to think

that the present attack had been made in the hope of sealing the victim's lips before he had a chance to tell what he knew about the murder of his pal, Wrigley.

"Probably they were aware of Gilder's appearance in court yesterday, and his release on bail," the deputy police commissioner told his subordinates, "but they did not know that he had already been on the grill in my office before he was handed over to the Federal authorities. They were under the impression that he had been pinched by the post-office inspectors instead of by us, and that I had not yet had a chance to have a talk with him. So they trailed him to this place, and pulled off this pleasant little job, with the idea of putting him out of the way before I could learn anything from him which would throw a light on the death of his partner. That's one theory. Another, of course, is that he, as well as Wrigley, was doomed because both of them were 'out to get' some enemy who was just as determined to get them first—a feud between crooks, in other words. Be that as it may, we can take it for granted that both of these murders are intimately connected, even though the method used in each case was different."

"I guess the newspaper boys will fairly eat up this story, eh, chief?" Detective Bourke remarked, with a deprecatory grin.

"I don't know about that," Oglivie responded, frowning. "I haven't quite made up my mind, but—maybe they won't get a chance."

Although, as a rule, he saw fit to lay most of his cards on the table by taking the press into his confidence to an extent which defied all detective traditions, he sometimes, as has been stated, found it expedient to withhold a trick or two. His frankness with the newspapermen was not particularly inspired by his friendliness toward them, but was part of a policy which was advantageous to him in his work. When he was of the opinion that more was to be gained by suppressing a detail than by giving it out to the papers he did not hesitate to suppress it. And in the present instance he was inclined to think that there might be certain strategical advantages in

keeping as many of the circumstances of Gilder's assassination as possible from the knowledge of the public. Therefore, he was at that moment contemplating a course of action which would have the effect of preventing the newspapers from perceiving the significance of this new crime.

The prospects of carrying out such a course successfully looked pretty good. In the first place the hour was favorable. It was 3:30 A.M., and the morning papers were already on the press and the members of their reportorial staffs homeward bound. This murder would not attract any attention until several hours later when the evening paper men came on the job, and by that time Oglivie's plans for "covering up" the circumstances surrounding the fate of Wrigley's partner would have been put into effect.

In the second place the concealment of the victim's identity would be a comparatively easy matter. He had registered at the hotel under an assumed name. There was nothing to show that he was the president of the Gotham Development Company, or had been connected in any way with the mysterious tragedy in the Interborough Building. And if that fact could be successfully kept from them, the newspaper representatives who took the trouble to look into this homicide later would not be likely to attach much importance to it.

The hotel was a cheap one, patronized by a class of men whose social standing was too negligible to make even the murder of one of them a cause for front-page headlines, unless there was something particularly sensational about the murder itself; and this crime, to those who were not aware of the real identity of the victim, would appear to be a commonplace, sordid affair, of trifling worth from the standpoint of news value. The unsuspecting scribes would probably dispose of it in a couple of cut-and-dried paragraphs, and then proceed to dismiss it from their minds.

Thus the chief of the Central Office reasoned, and after mature consideration he decided to take advantage of the situation and depart in this instance from his customary policy of frankness. In this way, he thought, the ends of justice would be

best served. The people who were responsible for this new sensational development would be perplexed by the apparent failure of the police to grasp its significance. Their bewilderment, he hoped, would soon give way to anxiety, and the panic which is born of suspense—the same desirable psychological effects which the Allied navies produced on the Hun, in the late war, by keeping him guessing as to the fate of his submarines. Psychology played a large part in the methods of Oglivie.

Perhaps, too, he had a more personal and less worthy reason for seeking to suppress this bit of news, or, at any rate, to so camouflage it that the journalistic investigators would be almost sure to miss its point. In spite of his popularity on Park Row some of the newspapers had been hounding him of late for his failure to get to the bottom of the Interborough Building murder mystery, as well as for the apparent inability of the Central Office to check the operations of a gang of daring forgers who had recently been terrorizing the financial district.

These editorial gibes had not entirely failed to get under his skin. He was good-natured, broad-minded, and a bigger man than most of his predecessors at police headquarters, but just the same he was only human, and he couldn't help resenting these criticisms. The thought of what his editorial critics would have to say if they learned that Wrigley's partner had been assassinated almost under the noses of his, Oglivie's, men, was naturally not exactly pleasing to him. It may have had something to do with his decision to keep the cover on this latest outrage.

It happened, however, that in making his plans the deputy police commissioner had failed to take into account the sharp eyes and unerring memory of a young man named Charlie Murray whose permanent assignment it was to cover Bellevue Hospital for the *Mercury*. To Bellevue, of course, is attached the city morgue, and it was part of young Mr. Murray's routine duty to keep a watchful eye on that grim institution.

On the afternoon following the murder at the Battery Hotel, Charlie's attention

was attracted toward a new arrival at the repository for the city's dead.

"What's this?" he asked one of the attendants, with the callousness which three years' connection with this place and its horrors had developed in him. "I didn't see it come in. When did it arrive?"

"This morning," the man answered, carelessly. "Guy named William Johnson—killed in a cheap hotel on the water front. Nothing for you to bother with, young fellow, unless your paper is mighty hard up for news."

"Let's have a look," the reporter persisted. "Named William Johnson, eh? Oh, yes; I remember now! The evening papers carried a paragraph about him. stabbed to death early to-day in a drunken brawl in the-Battery Hotel. Guess you're right, Pussy. Nothing in this for me. The poor beggar's face looks kind of familiar, though. Wonder where— Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?" the morgue attendant asked.

"Nothing much. I was just thinking out loud. It's a bad habit of mine. Guess I'll be getting along now, if you haven't anything more interesting for me to-day." And young Mr. Murray lighted a fresh cigarette and departed.

He came back again presently, however, to make another inspection of the earthly remains of "William Johnson." There was an air of suppressed excitement about him. He believed that he had made an important discovery.

The day before had been his regular day off. Like the motion picture machine operator who spent his vacation sitting beside the operator of another movie theater, Charlie Murray's ideas of recreation were rather peculiar. He had devoted the greater part of his holiday to visiting the newspapermen who covered various other departments throughout the city, and in the course of his rounds he had dropped in to have a chat with the "boys" who covered the Federal courts. Thus it happened that he had been present when Benjamin Franklin Gilder was arraigned before United States Commissioner Shields on a charge of using the mails with the intent to defraud. He had got a good look at Wrigley's part-

ner then, and he had a phenomenal memory for faces.

That faculty of his was asserting itself now. The thing, he admitted to himself, seemed too extraordinary to be possible, but just the same he was almost willing to make an affidavit that the man in the morgue under the name of William Johnson was the same man he had seen arraigned in court as Gilder.

When Gordon Hemment entered the *Mercury's* city room at five that evening he found Bailey, the city editor, frowning over a telephone conversation he had just finished with young Murray.

"Here's something that will interest you, Hemment, I rather think," the editor exclaimed. "I don't know how good it is, but our Bellevue man has sent in a tip which is worth looking into. He has an idea that the man who was murdered this morning in the Battery Hotel was Gilder, the other partner in that get-rich-quick concern—and he talks as though he was perfectly sober."

"Young Murray is a pretty level-headed chap," Hemment remarked. "As you say, this is worth looking into."

He went to a telephone booth and got the Bellevue reporter on the wire. When he had finished his talk with the latter he hurried over to the post-office building, where he sought and found his friend, Inspector Tom Morrisey.

"What do you know about the murder of Gilder, Tom?" he asked, adroitly. "We're short a few details, and anything you can tell me in confidence will be appreciated."

"I can't tell you a thing about it," the secret service man replied, for once thrown off his guard. "I'm sorry, old man, but I promised Oglivie I wouldn't talk about the matter. You'll have to see him. No hard feeling, I hope. I'd be glad to help you out if I could, but—a promise is a promise."

He had, however, given the *Mercury* reporter more help than he imagined. So the thing was true! Charlie Murray's memory had not played tricks with him! And Deputy Police Commissioner Oglivie was trying to suppress the story!

A whimsical smile curved Hemment's

lips at the latter thought, as he made his way out of the post office building.

"I'm rather glad that Oglivie tried to hold out on us," he mused. "He's such a decent chap, and I felt rather mean about taking information from him without giving him what I knew in return. Sort of went against my sporting blood. But now my conscience is going to be easier."

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHADOWING JOB.

IT is not an easy matter to maintain an even half way thorough espionage over the tenant of a big office building. Any detective will tell you that it is one of the most difficult tasks you can set him, because of the unfavorable conditions he has to contend with.

You can keep careful track of your man's comings and goings, perhaps. That part may be simple enough. You can lay in wait for him down-stairs in the lobby of the building, and when you see him enter furtively follow him into the elevator and keep your eye on him until he has disappeared within his office. But once the door of that office has closed behind him—what are you going to do after that? How are you going to glean any sort of an idea of what goes on within that room? Unless you are a wire-tapper how are you going to overhear his conversations on the telephone? And, more important still, how are you going to find out who his callers are and the nature of their business?

Keeping tabs on the people who go in and out of his office is not the least difficult part of your problem. You cannot, with that purpose in view, take up a position in the corridor up-stairs, and keep your eyes glued on his door—that is, you cannot follow that course if it is necessary to keep your suspect in ignorance of the fact that he is under surveillance. For, in the up-stairs halls of an office building there is, as a rule, no place in which you can conceal yourself. You must remain in the open, continually exposed to the view of the man you are watching, in case he should pop out suddenly. Moreover, if you loiter there for

any length of time you yourself may soon be an object of suspicion to the employes of the building, or some of the other tenants, who are likely to notify the janitor that there is a questionable-looking character skulking on the premises.

Hemment had found himself up against these difficulties when he began his self-imposed task of shadowing Cecilie Harvey's fiancé, which for the past week had engrossed his time and attention. But before he had been at it very long an unexpected bit of good fortune supplied him with a means of making his work easier by bringing about a chance meeting on Nassau Street between himself and a young attorney named Brannan whose acquaintance he had met while both of them were aboard the same destroyer helping their Uncle Sam hunt for Hun U-boats.

"Come up and see me, old man, some time," Brannan had said in parting. "I'm in the Interborough Building—twentieth floor, Room 2002. Any time you're passing my way I should be glad to have you drop in and take lunch with me."

"Room 2002!" the reporter exclaimed, a gleam of interest in his eyes. "Why, that must be very near the office where there was a murder the other day!"

"Right you are. I'm on the same floor, and only a few doors away. That unfortunate chap and I were neighbors, so to speak, although I wasn't acquainted with him. Hadn't even noticed that the concern was in the building until I read about that shocking affair in the papers. Interesting case, isn't it. Have you been doing any work on it?"

"A little," Hemment answered. "Well, I'm glad to have seen you again, Brannan."

"Same here. Don't forget to look me up the next time you're in this neighborhood, and have a little time to spare."

He was rather surprised at the promptitude with which the newspaperman availed himself of his invitation. Less than three hours after this conversation the latter was seated in his room, noting with inward satisfaction that the window of Underwood's office across the street was in plain view of where he sat.

"Nice, large place you have here," Hem-

ment remarked. "I suppose you wouldn't care to rent part of it for a few days? I've got some special literary work to do, and am looking for desk room in some quiet office. This would just about suit me. If you could put me up I'd bring my own typewriter, and I'd try not to be in your way. All I'd want would be a chair and a small table over there by the window, and—whenever you had confidential matters to discuss with your clients I wouldn't mind being chased out."

"Confidential matters to discuss with my clients!" the young attorney repeated, with a grin. "That's pretty good! Between you and me, old top, I haven't seen a client since I was mustered out of the navy. I'm almost beginning to think that there ain't no such animal. I'm so tired of sitting here alone, waiting for business to pick up that I should be mighty glad to have your company. What is this literary work you're going to do? A play?"

"A melodrama," Hemment told him, his eyes twinkling.

"Good enough! How long do you figure it is going to take you to finish it?"

"That's hard to tell. Depends on how my villain behaves. He's giving us quite some trouble at present. But I feel confident that it isn't going to be very long before I have all the kinks in the plot straightened out."

"Well, you needn't hurry so far as I'm concerned," said Brannan. "As I remarked before I'll be very glad to have you here, old boy, and the longer the better."

So Hemment brought his typewriter, a green eyeshade, and a half-completed manuscript of a dramatic production he had begun some years ago when as a cub reporter he had yielded to the impulse to attempt to write "the Great American Drama," and was duly installed at a small table over by the window in Brannan's office.

For a week since then his legal friend had been watching him hammering away at his typewriter, and had marveled at the vagaries of the artistic temperament, and the eccentricities of genius, which in this budding playwright's case manifested themselves in a peculiar form. At frequent and

irregular intervals, and for no reason at all, apparently, Hemment would suddenly halt his literary labors to jump up abruptly, snatch off his green eyeshade, grab his hat, and rush out of the room. In each instance it was some time before he returned, and the only explanation that Brannan could get out of him was that he had gone out in search of "inspiration."

Thus far the inspiration the *Mercury's* star reporter sought had not been forthcoming. From his observation post at Brannan's window he had been fairly successful in keeping track of the movements of the man across the street. When he saw Underwood preparing to go out it was a simple matter for him to get down-stairs in time to shadow the suspect to his destination; and when he caught a glimpse of a visitor in the accountant's office he was able in most cases to get a close-up view of him by hurrying over to the Bannister Building and waiting in the lobby until the stranger came down in the elevator, when, if the latter looked promising enough, he proceeded to trail him until he had succeeded in getting a line on his identity. But, as yet, Hemment had accomplished nothing by these maneuvers. The place to which he trailed Cecilie's fiancé were to all appearances legitimate business offices which did not seem to have any bearing on the matter he was investigating; and the men who called on Underwood at his own office had proved equally disappointing, so far as furnishing any clues to the mystery were concerned.

Nor did Hemment's active interest in his man cease at the close of business hours. Underwood lived alone—except for a Japanese man-servant—in a rather pretentious bachelor apartment in the Murray Hill district. The indefatigable journalistic investigator spent his evenings and a large part of his nights in watching this place. The people who called on the accountant there, and the latter's excursions after dark, did not escape his observation. But up to date they had thrown no light on the problem with which Hemment was grappling.

Mr. Ethan Underwood, certified public accountant, in short, after being under close surveillance for several days, still had

the reporter guessing. If there was aught about his recent activities and associations to indicate that he was not the plain, reputable business man by day, and the respectable member of the community by night, which he appeared, Hemment had to confess that he had not been sharp enough to detect it. Moreover the demeanor of Cecilie's fiancé gave no hint that his conscience was troubled. If surface appearances could always be relied on, it would have been incredible that this smiling, frank-faced, good-looking chap could be responsible for the cold-blooded murder in the Interborough Building, either as a principal or an accessory.

And now there was a second murder to be charged to his account—if Hemment's suspicions were well founded. That made those earlier suspicions seem even more unwarranted. Why, Underwood had been to the opera that night. His shadower had observed him, in company with a man friend, occupying an orchestra seat at the Metropolitan, only a few hours before Wrigley's partner had been slain in his bed in the cheap, water-front hotel. And after the performance he had gone straight home. Hemment, concealed in the shadows, had heard him humming "The Soldiers' Chorus" from "Faust" as he stepped from the taxicab into the hall of his apartment house.

Could a man sing and smile and still be a villain? Unfortunately the reporter's long experience with the sordid side of life had taught him that such a thing was possible.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. MONCRIEF.

"IT'S true," Hemment reported to Bailey. "They've got Gilder, too. Ye gods! Murder seems to be becoming a habit with our mysterious friend in the Bannister Building."

The city editor nodded. "It looks as though this might be his work," he agreed. "Although we can't be sure, of course. May be merely a coincidence after all. The astonishing outcome of the assignment

I gave Miss Harvey has taught me to have a healthy respect for Old Man Coincidence. Who'd have suspected when I handed her that freak advertisement to look into, that I was thrusting her into a situation in which her own sweetheart played a star part?" He paused. "By the way, how are you making out with him? Got anything more on him yet?"

"Not much," the reporter answered, with a slight frown. "He's proving even a bit more difficult than I expected. I've been watching him for a week now, and I must confess that I am hardly any further than when I started. If it weren't for the package I saw on his desk, with the double reef knot tied in the string, and the other circumstances which seem to justify my suspicions, I'd almost begin to think that I've been wasting my time barking up the wrong tree."

"Maybe you have, anyway," Bailey suggested, sardonically. "I don't want to discourage you, but it has occurred to me more than once during the past few days that you might be attaching too much importance to the circumstantial evidence you imagine you've got against this fellow Underwood."

Hement shook his head. "If he isn't guilty himself, he knows who is," he declared. "Underwood is the key to the mystery. I am positive of that."

"Well, I hope you're right," the editor rejoined, shrugging. "Anyhow, I have an idea that presently you and I are going to have rather an uncomfortable time trying to square ourselves for hampering the authorities in their work by withholding important information." He smiled grimly. "Why, the course we're taking comes mighty near making us accessories after the fact! Have you thought of that?"

"The end will justify the means."

"Possibly it will—if you make good. But if this theory of yours should happen to prove a flivver—good night!" Bailey hesitated. "I'm wondering whether we hadn't better print the facts about the Harvey girl's assignment in to-morrow's paper, without waiting any longer for you to verify your suspicions regarding that fellow."

"And run the risk of imperiling the girl's life—to say nothing of spoiling our chance of pulling off the biggest 'beat' the paper has had in a dog's age!" Hement protested.

"Imperiling her life! That's a bit far-fetched."

"Is it? I wish I could think so. We have reason to believe that two men have been murdered already because they knew too much about Underwood's affairs, or because they were trying to pry into them."

"But that's different. These men were his enemies. The young woman, on the other hand, is his sweetheart. She isn't in any danger."

"She may be safe enough at present, but print that information in to-morrow's paper and there's no telling how it will react on her. Once the police learn the identity of the supposedly deaf girl who was employed in Wrigley's office, and her reasons for being there, it won't be very long before their suspicions will be directed toward the man she was engaged to marry."

The location of Underwood's office, and the girl's unwillingness to come forward, won't fail to impress themselves on Oglivie you can be sure. And if Underwood finds himself under suspicion, with an indictment for murder staring him in the face, who knows how far he will go to make sure that Miss Harvey won't be used as a witness against him later? An unwilling witness, perhaps, but a mighty formidable one just the same; for her testimony would come pretty near to convicting him, as he must realize."

"He might marry her, instead of murdering her," the city editor suggested dryly. "It is the law of the State, I believe, that a married woman cannot be compelled to testify against her husband in a criminal proceeding."

"If he's the scoundrel I believe him to be, that would be almost as bad," Hement rejoined, frowning. "She got to be found and removed from all possible danger before we give our man cause for becoming alarmed."

Bailey shrugged again; "All right; have it your own way," he acquiesced. "We'll keep what we know about that lip-reading

business to ourselves for the present. In case there should be anything in this theory of yours I suppose it would be a pity to deprive the paper of the credit of solving the mystery by helping the police to get there first." He paused. "Got any idea at all where the young woman is hiding herself?"

"Not yet. She seems to have disappeared as completely as if the earth had yawned and swallowed her up. I've had a friend of mine in Boston look up Underwood's sister there. She's working on a paper at the Hub, and I thought it possible that Miss Harvey might have gone out to her. They were chums at the School of Journalism. But nothing doing in that direction. My friend reports that he's been watching Miss Underwood closely for a couple of days, and is satisfied that the girl isn't with her.

"There isn't any doubt in my mind, though," the reporter declared, "that Underwood knows where she is. As I said before, he's been a bit too clever for me so far, but by watching him I hope eventually to get a line on Miss Harvey's whereabouts. Pretty soon, if I have any luck at all, he's going to make some little slip, careful though he is, which will put me on the right track."

"Better be careful yourself!" the city editor advised, with more feeling than he usually displayed. "I suppose you realize that you're playing a somewhat dangerous game, young man? If this fellow should happen to discover that you are trying to hang these murders on him, and he's as desperate as you imagine, he and his friends—er—may take it into their heads to try to discourage you."

"I have been in the newspaper game too long to be easily discouraged," the reporter responded, with a careless laugh. "Of course, though, I'm not going about my work with a fife and drum corps in front of me. I made it a point, when I interviewed Underwood in his office that day to give him the impression that nothing was further from my thoughts than the fact that he was involved in the affair across the street, and I have done everything I could to conceal the interest I've been taking in him since then. I feel confident that he

isn't wise to the attention I'm giving him. And he won't be either, if I can help it, until we're ready to call the turn on him."

Hemment wrote the sensational story of the murder of Wrigley's partner, which—much to the annoyance of the head of the Central Office detective bureau—appeared on the front page of the *Mercury*, the following morning. Then he went back to his job of shadowing the mysterious occupant of the office on the twentieth floor of the Bannister Building. More was to be accomplished by sticking to that line of investigation, he felt sure, than by giving further attention to the latest startling development in the case.

Gilder's fate was, after all, merely an incident in this puzzling affair. Underwood, as he had remarked to the city editor, was the key to the entire problem. And although the negative results of his week of watchful waiting had strained his patience almost to the breaking point, he was doggedly determined to keep on watching Cecilie's fiancé until he had succeeded in piercing the veil of mystery which, he was certain, enshrouded the activities of that suave, prepossessing gentleman—until he had got possession of the secret which, evidently, was of such deadly importance that two rash men who had tried to pry into it had paid for their curiosity with their lives.

The reporter's luck seemed to have deserted him, however. Another week went by without anything happening to reward his patient vigil. Still not a hint from the man in the Bannister Building as to the hiding place of his girl reporter friend; not a move, or even a gesture, from him which helped to confirm Hemment's suspicions that he was directly or indirectly responsible for the violent deaths of Wrigley and Gilder.

Underwood continued to show up at his office at nine every morning, regularly. Sometimes he remained at his desk all day, working over books, or dictating letters to the little, weakened, old clerk who seemed to be his sole employee. Sometimes he went right out again, merely tarrying long enough to look through his mail, and did not return until evening; but on these oc-

casions his shadower had reason to believe that he went to attend to the business of clients which had to be done on their own premises; for he was in their offices all day, and they appeared to be reputable enough concerns.

The man's behavior after business hours, too, continued to be disgustingly disappointing, from Hemment's standpoint. Sometimes he attended the opera, or a theater; sometimes he remained in his bachelor apartment all evening to entertain visitors—but they were always eminently respectable looking people, and, for all the watcher down-stairs could learn to the contrary, were as inoffensive as they looked. Verily for a bachelor Mr. Ethan Underwood seemed to lead an unusually staid and exemplary life!

"How are you getting along with your play?" Hemment's lawyer friend asked him one morning. "You don't seem to be making very great headway with it. That villain of yours still bothering you? Getting out of hand again?"

"I haven't quite got him where I want him yet," the dramatist answered with a rueful smile.

"Why don't you cut him out and get another one? That's what I'd do if he wouldn't fit in."

"Not a bad idea," Hemment muttered, thoughtfully. "I've had that in mind myself more than once lately. But the trouble is that if I discard him my whole plot falls to pieces and—"

He did not finish the sentence. Through the green eye-shade he always wore to conceal his features when seated at his desk near the window he had caught sight of another visitor in Underwood's office. He reached for his hat and started toward the door.

"Going out for more inspiration?" Brannan inquired with a quizzical grin. He had by this time fully come to the conclusion that all literary workers, and playwrights in particular, were mentally unbalanced.

"I hope so. I am sorely in need of it," said Hemment.

He proceeded down-stairs and across the street, where he took up a position in the

lobby of the Bannister Building, near the cigar-stand.

An hour later the man he was waiting for stepped out of one of the elevators. He was a gentleman of impressive bearing, sixty or thereabouts, but well preserved and exceedingly well-groomed. At first glance he might have passed for one of those nice, eminently proper old gentlemen who are occasionally to be seen looking out of the windows of the Fifth Avenue clubs. But as the newspaperman scrutinized his smooth-shaven, aristocratic countenance it occurred to him that there was a suggestion of the sinister about the keen eyes and in the set of the thin lips of Underwood's recent visitor. Nor was this Hemment's only mental reaction. A vague memory stirring within him caused him to entertain the thought that this was not the first time he had gazed upon the face of this man.

"Queer!" he mused as he proceeded to trail along in the wake of the fellow. "I'm quite positive that he hasn't been here before since I've been on the job. And yet I'd be almost ready to swear that we've met somewhere, even though I'm unable to place him."

He was still wrestling with his balky memory when half an hour later he followed Underwood's caller into the ornate lobby of a big upper Broadway hotel. Evidently the latter was stopping at this place, for he nodded to the clerks and went right on toward the elevators without registering.

The *Mercury* reporter stepped up to the desk and questioned the room clerk, whom he knew well enough to address by his given name.

"Who is that chap who just came in, Fred? The old boy you just greeted with the gladsome smile?"

"You mean Mr. Moncrief?"

"Moncrief, eh!" Hemment muttered. The name meant nothing to him. "How long has he been stopping here?"

"About six months, I should say. He's a resident guest. Has a suite on the ninth floor."

"Who is he? What does he do for a living?"

"I don't believe he does anything. Neither would you, my son, if you had his

coin. He's a retired banker—at least, so I understand. Why are you interested in him?"

"Thought I knew him at first," the reporter explained. "But I guess I've got hold of the wrong man."

Outside on Broadway, ten minutes later, his face suddenly lighted up.

"Ye gods!" he ejaculated excitedly. "I believe I've got it! It hardly seems possible that I can be right, but—if it's true it looks as though I've struck oil at last."

He hurried to the *Mercury* office, but he did not enter the city room. His objective was the newspaper's "morgue"—the department in which many thousands of newspaper and magazine clippings relating to persons and events, great and small, which had figured in the news of the past and might possibly so figure again, were properly classified and stored away for future use.

"Let's have that clipping I was looking at the other day, Larry," Hemment requested the man in charge. "I believe you've got it stowed away in the 'Post-Office Inspector's' envelope."

The "morgue-keeper" turned to one of the many cabinets with which the room was lined and presently produced a bulky, long manila envelope. From among a bunch of newspaper cuttings which paid tribute to the skill and efficiency of the men of the postal secret service the reporter selected a clipping, yellowed with age, which had been in his hands once before—at the time when he had first learned of the prison records of the late Mr. Howard Parsons Wrigley and his equally ill-fated partner.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The clipping, a page from the Sunday supplement of the *Mercury*, dated some fifteen years ago, told of the conviction for misuse of the United States mails of "Ben-ny Gersten" and "Finny Wellington," under which names Cecilie Harvey's late employers had been known at that stage of their eventful lives. Half-tone portraits of these two gentlemen adorned the page, but it was not their pictures which now interested Hemment.

There was another illustration on the clipping—the profile portrait of a fine-looking man of aristocratic mien, which bore beneath it the following caption:

Alton, alias "Duke" Lestrade, notorious swindler who saved himself by turning State's evidence against his accomplices in the Phenix Oil Stock frauds.

Hemment studied this half-tone reproduction intently for a moment.

"I thought so!" he mused triumphantly. "He's changed quite a little within the past fifteen years, but the likeness is unmistakable. Underwood's visitor, Mr. Moncrief, is Duke Lestrade, the crook who squealed on Wrigley and Gilder—the man who Inspector Morrissey told me was dead. Evidently he didn't go down with the Titanic after all. Morrissey must have been misinformed."

He put the clipping into his pocket and went into the city room with a smile of elation on his features.

He had struck oil at last. There was still a great deal to be cleared up before his problem could be regarded as solved, but at least this was a beginning.

MORNING SONG

MORNING at your window smiles;
She has crossed the world for miles,
Just to look at you—
Brought you all her dew,
Waits, her arms with roses laden,
Just to look upon you, maiden—
Oh, your eyes are blue!

Far across the eastern sky,
When the stars began to die,
For your lovely sake
Softly did she take
Shoes of pearl and came tiptoeing,
Noiseless as a lily blowing—
Just to see you wake!

Richard Le Gallienne.

The Policy Sleuth



Nº 4. A Race at Ostend by Edgar Wallace

"WHAT do people go to Ostend for?" asked Bob Brewer irritably, addressing the president of Federated Assurances.

Douglas Campbell shook his head.

"Why do people do anything? Because somebody else does it. Ostend I like, personally. I like to paddle with the kids and to bathe with the girls."

"Phew!" said Bob, fanning himself vigorously.

"I mean," said Mr. Campbell hastily, "I like the mixed bathing. I like the sea and I like the Digue and I like to sit in the Kursaal and listen to the orchestra."

"Nobody cares what you like," rejoined Bob; "I am asking why regular people who have their own money to spend do it?"

"Well, there are the races," explained Mr. Campbell. "There's the Cercle Privée where you can make or lose money, according to your luck. There's the perfectly delightful air, the lobsters—anyway, people go to Ostend, and I have booked you an inexpensive room at a nice little hotel near the docks."

"You can cancel that," said Bob, "and book me a *suite de luxe* at the Splendid, which I understand is the most expensive of the hotels."

"But, my dear chap, there's nothing on," insisted the desperate Mr. Campbell.

"You are simply going over with a watching brief. You are not taking on any special job. In fact, it's a kind of holiday for you. The directors feel that they would like you to enjoy yourself without any worry or care. Of course, if you see a man go up to one of our clients and take his pearl pin you will do your best to persuade him not to. But there is no special reason why you should go over."

"All right, I won't go," rejoined the other.

"At the same time," Mr. Campbell was in a hurry to explain, "there are four necklaces and a collar of diamonds already there, about one hundred thousand pounds' worth of pearls which are going on Saturday's boat and quite a number of emeralds which are due to leave next week."

"What am I to do with these interesting jewels if I see them?" asked Bob. "I presume you mean that people who are owners of these baubles, and who are heavily insured with this office, are either in Ostend or are going there. You don't mean to suggest that three or four necklaces are going to walk arm-in-arm on the boat, or that I shall meet an emerald in the smoking-room drinking an absinthe frappé?"

"That is what I mean," said Mr. Campbell. "You go over and keep your eyes skinned."

"It is not keeping my eyes skinned, it's sitting on a confoundedly hot beach getting my nose skinned that worries me. But because you are a nice, kind Scotsman or rather you bear a Scottish name, which is altogether different, I will oblige you. Book me that suite at the Splendid."

"Couldn't you go disguised as a humble tourist?" asked Mr. Campbell anxiously, "and live in accordance with your rôle?"

"I am going disguised as an arrogant millionaire—I find I can live up to that part much better," said Bob.

It was, however, at the more modest establishment, the Hotel des Thermes, which during the war had been a regimental headquarters of the Germans and had been bombed accordingly, that Bob took up his residence. He spent the first day in a motor-car, visiting the battle-fields between Dixmude and Ypres and came back in a chastened frame of mind.

He went to the Kursaal that night and heard the music, strolled into the Cercle Privée and found it very uninteresting, searched a few cafés in the hope of meeting undesirable acquaintances, and drew blank, and went to bed that night with the conviction that whatever temptations divers unattached ropes of pearls, diamonds and emeralds might offer to the criminal classes, Ostend at that moment was singularly innocent.

When he turned out to take the early morning sunshine he thought he had never seen Ostend looking more beautiful. The flower-beds in the center of the broad avenue leading to the Kursaal blazed with color. The buildings, white and delicate-looking, the glass-fronted restaurants, the flower-decked balconies all combined to produce that sense of holiday which only the Continental town can bring to the stranger.

After breakfast he strolled into the office of the chief of police, and the Belgian greeted him as a long-lost brother, for they had worked together in New York two years before the war.

"No," said the chief, "there are no bad men here. We watch the boats carefully and so do the British police at the other end. Lew Simmons got through, but I pulled him in and sent him back by the

next boat. A couple of crooks who came from Paris by way of Brussels I caught the first day they were here and they are in prison at Ghent on a charge of traveling with forged passports. No, Mr. Brewer, Ostend is blameless."

"It's too blamed blameless to be good," commented Bob. "It isn't natural, with all this portable property lying about and the right hooks of crookdom suffering from a chronic itch for spoil, that you should not shelter a lad or two who is collecting material for his great work on 'How I Got Rich at Ostend, by One Who Did It.'"

"It does seem unreal," admitted the Belgian, "but there you are! I've been through the Coq D'Or crowd with a small tooth-comb, if you will pardon the vulgarity."

"Oh, I'll pardon it," said Bob, "I've been through there myself. It's full of simple-minded people drinking lemon-squash and playing dominoes. Yet, I can't escape the conviction that a raid is being planned—By the way, isn't Teddy Bolter in Belgium?"

The police chief nodded.

"A reformed character, *monsieur*," he added emphatically. "He was in Brussels during the occupation by the Germans and rendered invaluable assistance to Belgium. He is running a little American bar here in this town. You will find it in the Rue Petit Leopold."

"I'll see Teddy," said Bob, and to Teddy he went.

Mr. Bolter was a stout, broad-shouldered man of middle age. He carried in his face a cigar which maintained itself at an angle of forty-five degrees and never seemed to grow any shorter.

"Why, if it isn't Mr. Brewer," he exclaimed, extending a hearty hand across the zinc counter. "Well, wonders will never cease. Will you have a soft drink, Mr. Brewer, or shall I make you a nice Bronx, Manhattan, Gin Sling, Martini, Clover Club?"

"Get thee behind me, Satan," retorted Bob. "How are things, Teddy?"

"Bright and straight," answered Teddy slowly and deliberately emphasizing the last word. "An honorable old age for mine

and a lovely little villa at St. Jean de Luz, where I can tell my golden-haired grandchildren the story of my adventurous life."

"Very, very pretty," said Bob; "that's the stuff to give 'em, Teddy. I can see you sitting in front of your château, bathed in the golden sunlight, spiling the story of how you smashed the Bank of Detroit and shot up the watchman. It's a story," Bob mused, "which would bring tears to the eyes of the young and innocent," he added, "and golden-haired."

"Say, that's all gone by," affirmed Teddy. "I'm straight now, Mr. Brewer. Gee! If I had my life to live over again!"

"It's hardly likely that you will have," said Bob, "so why worry. Any of the boys here?"

"Boys?" repeated the puzzled Mr. Bolter. "You don't mean crooks, I hope, because if you do I haven't seen one for years, except my dago bartender, who dipped into the till and lit out for Holland."

"Deepest regrets," said Bob. "A new experience for you, Teddy."

Mr. Bolter ignored the implication.

"No, sir," he said, energetically swobbing the counter as he spoke. "I'm through with that game. I've got a nice lot of customers. All the trainers and jockeys come in here and I get a lot of information about horses—I suppose you're not staying for the races, are you, Mr. Brewer?"

"I'm not so sure," answered Bob. "My movements are a little uncertain."

"Here on business, perhaps?" suggested the other carelessly.

"I am making a business of pleasure just now," answered Bob, "but if I stay on I'll come to you for a tip."

"You needn't trouble to come," said Teddy earnestly. "I can tell you what will win the big handicap—Thotis, the English horse that has come over to run for Mr. Mandle Jones."

Bob was on his way to the door, but at the name of Mr. Mandle Jones he turned, for who did not know Mandle Jones—his father was born Mendleheimer—the young gentleman who had discovered one hundred and ninety-five novel ways of losing money?

"I'd like to do you a good turn, sir,"

Teddy went on, but was stopped by the queer look in the other's eyes.

"Would you, Teddy?" said Bob quietly. "Well, I don't know that you owe me any great love."

"Let bygones be bygones," rejoined Teddy stoutly. "You were only doing your duty and I'm not a man that harbors malice. You back Thotis. It arrived from England this morning, and if it doesn't win I'll eat my boots."

"A fat lot of good that would do me," said Bob, "if I had backed it. However, I'll take your word for it."

He went back to his hotel to find a telegram which ran:

Urgent: Am coming to Ostend. Meet me this afternoon's boat.

Bob knit his forehead over this, but punctually at the hour was waiting on the quay when the Princess Clementine came alongside.

"Welcome to Ostend," said Bob extravagantly as Douglas Campbell stepped ashore. "You have just come in time to make money. I've had a great tip for to-morrow's race."

Mr. Campbell looked at him.

"It isn't Thotis by any chance, is it?" he asked, and Bob stared.

"Now, you've been reading the sporting newspapers," he said. "What do you know about Thotis?"

"Nothing," answered Campbell, "except that I've come over with the owner. I want to introduce you to him. Just stand here for a little while."

The owner was a young man who looked as if he had stepped out of a bandbox, so polished and well creased was he.

"Hello, Campbell!" he said. "I thought I had got rid of you."

"May I introduce Mr. Robert Brewer?" said Campbell, and the young man favored Bob with a nod, and after a few generalities passed on to join his valet at the customs counter.

"What's the idea?" asked Bob.

Campbell did not explain till they reached the hotel.

"Bob," he said, "I have often talked to you about the follies of society."

"Too often," admitted Bob.

"Well," continued Campbell, "I am inclined to revise my opinion. I discovered yesterday that one of our companies had effected a policy which, for sheer insanity and one-sidedness, is about the worst thing I have seen in all my career. That a member of society should have put one over on us makes me, as I say, revise my opinion of the aristocracy."

"For Heaven's sake!" said Bob. "You are not referring to young Mendleheimer in these flattering terms."

"That's the man," nodded Mr. Campbell; "his blood may not be as blue as the Bruces or the Stuarts, but he is very popular and he has money to burn. Now, listen to this."

He took out his pocketbook and drew forth a folded paper, which he opened.

"This is the rough scheme of his policy. We undertake to insure all his personal property against burglary, larceny, whether larceny from the person or from the house, larceny by fraud, larceny by a trick and robbery with violence. Now nobody who knows this young man's habits would have effected a policy like that, and the manager that put it through has been fired and the director who endorsed the policy has had to resign. It has six months to run and hitherto he has been watched by the insurance company concerned. But now, in the terms of a contract by which the company in question came into the Federation, the liability is ours."

"Well?" said Bob.

"Well," went on Campbell, "that poor, misguided young man has brought thirty thousand pounds in Bank of England notes to Ostend to back this very horse you spoke of."

Bob scratched his chin.

"That's absurd," he said. "How could he put thirty thousand pounds on his horse in the totalizer? He would get such a poor return for his money that it wouldn't be worth doing. Besides, what if he does lose it, or risk it? You have not insured him against betting losses."

"We have insured him against larceny by a trick and I am convinced it is by a trick he is going to lose it, because, accord-

ing to people who understand such things, his horse cannot be beaten."

"I'll have a talk with him," said Bob, after a moment's thought. "I am rather curious on one point."

"Talk with him after dinner. He is coming to dine with me to-night."

Mr. Mandle Jones came to dinner, but with an ill-grace, evidently regretting his appointment.

"Look here, you fellows," he said, "I sha'n't be able to stay long and why you came over goodness knows!" turning to Campbell. "If you don't mind my being perfectly frank—that's my weak point, frankness—I think it was a bit of cheek of your company to interfere. Just as if I wasn't to be trusted with money."

"Mr. Jones," said Campbell earnestly, "I was an old friend of your father's and the least I can do is to look after his son's interests."

Mandle Jones laughed.

"I know all about you," he said, "I've got a funny insurance policy which you have just taken over, haven't I?" He winked at Bob. "I forget the details, but do you guarantee me against any losses I incur at horse-racing?"

"That's the question I was asking," smiled Bob. "I can't see you losing anyway if all I hear about the horse is true, but I certainly can't see you winning anything."

"Why not?" asked Mandle Jones sharply.

Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you know how the Pari Mutuel works. The money taken by the totalizer is divided up, less ten per cent among those who have backed the winning horse. Suppose you have a big bet, thirty thousand pounds, shall I say?"

"You evidently know all about it," grinned Mandle Jones.

"Well, suppose you do and the general public subscribe twenty thousand pounds between them on yours and other horses. That means sixty thousand pounds to be divided out, less ten per cent. Obviously you cannot make much more profit than about ten thousand pounds."

"Agreed, my buck!" smiled Mandle

Jones jovially, "and that is why I am not going to bet on the infernal totalizer."

"But what bookmaker would take your money?" asked Bob.

"Burgen & Brock," replied the other promptly, and Bob noted the names. "I have fixed it up with them. They are going to lay me four to one to my money. What do you think of that?"

"I think they must be philanthropists," said Bob.

When the young man had left the dining-room he rose.

"I am going out to make a few inquiries, Campbell. Bookmakers don't bet in that big way and somehow it doesn't seem natural to me."

He sought out the hall porter, a mine of accurate information on all things Belgian.

"Oh, yes, *monsieur*, I know Burgen & Brock. It is the oldest established book-making firm in Belgium."

"Are they straight?" asked Bob bluntly.

"Oh, yes, perfectly straight, and in the old days all the aristocracy who came here used to bet with them. Of course, they have had a bad time during the war like everybody else. Mr. Burgen died and Mr. Brock carries on the business."

He strolled into the Cercle Privée at the Kursaal and found two or three men who were associated with British sport whom he knew well. Lord Tathington was one of these and his lordship was very emphatic.

"Both Burgen and Brock are straight," he said. "Brock, who has the business now since his partner died, is as honorable a man as you could wish to deal with. Why do you ask? Have you had a bet with them?"

"No," said Bob. "Where does Brock live?"

"He has an office in Brussels, but either he or his representative attend the Ostend races."

Bob looked at his watch. He had ten minutes to catch the night train to Brussels and, though it meant traveling in evening dress, he made the journey, arriving in the middle of the night.

It was not until lunch-time on the day of the races that Douglas Campbell, an uneasy man—he was cursed with a psychic sense of impending loss—saw his sleuth.

"What have you discovered?" he asked eagerly.

"Lots of things," replied Bob. "Say, have you ever tried making inquiries about the stability of a bookmaker at 3 A.M. in a foreign town? Unless I am greatly mistaken about Mandle Jones he is one of those simple souls who have implicit faith in themselves and nobody else."

Campbell nodded.

"So I thought."

"But I think it is a little too late to make explanations to him. I want you to do exactly as I tell you."

"They are not going to poison the horse, are they?" asked Campbell.

"I shouldn't imagine so," replied Bob. "I believe the horse is very well guarded and there is not a chance of getting at him. At least, my brief inquiries lead to this view."

"But what do you mean when you say I have got to carry out your instructions?" asked Douglas Campbell fearfully.

"You must agree to every suggestion I make, and now if you are ready we will go to the Hippodrome."

The Wellington Hippodrome was crowded with racegoers, and with difficulty they made their way into the paddock. The numbers had gone up for the first race, but it was not until that race was being run and the paddock was comparatively empty that they saw Mandle Jones, who also saw them, and tried to avoid them. But Bob was not to be avoided. He planted himself squarely in the young owner's way.

"Mr. Jones, I have got a plain proposition to make to you," he began.

"Chuck it off your chest," said Mandle Jones inelegantly.

"Well, I will tell you first of all that I am a detective and it is my job to make inquiries. Are you backing your horse with ready money?"

Jones frowned and hesitated.

"Yes," he said shortly. "I have brought the money with me."

"In one thousand pound notes, I presume," said Bob.

The other nodded.

"Well, what about it?" he added.

"Will you do me this favor?" the detec-

tive went on. "Don't back this horse of yours until it has gone to the post."

"You can bet your life I sha'n't," smiled the other. "Not until I see him safe on the course do I invest a penny."

"That's promise No. 1," said Bob. "You have been offered four to one on your money. Does it seem strange to you that the bookmakers guarantee this price up to the time of the race?"

"It's a gamble for them," answered Mr. Jones. "What's the next thing you want?"

"I will tell you that later," said Bob.

The crowd came swarming back into the paddock and waited with patience till the price of the last winner was displayed on the Pari Mutuel board and then the betting began for the Municipal Cup.

Bob saw with interest that on the bookmaker's list Thotis was a two-to-one chance and was never quoted at more than five to two. He took his place near the mild and spectacled young man who stood in line with the other bookmakers and bore the magic legend upon the band of his straw hat: "Burgin & Brock."

Presently he saw Mr. Mandle Jones approach him and, gripping Campbell's arm, he moved forward. The horses were leaving the paddock, and Mr. Jones had kept his promise.

"Don't detain me," he said. "Put your proposition as quickly as you can."

"It is this," said Bob, "Burgin & Brock offer you four to one for your money. Mr. Campbell offers you five to one."

The wail of protest which rose to Campbell's lips was not heard in the din. Mandle Jones hesitated.

"But you are not a bookmaker."

"Do you doubt Mr. Campbell's ability to pay?" asked Bob.

"Certainly not," said the young man and looked over Bob's shoulder to the expectant representative of Burgin & Brock.

"Is it a bet?" asked Bob.

Mr. Mandle Jones came from a race whose passion in life is to bet a little over the odds.

"It's a bet," he answered.

Bob held out his hand and thirty crisp one thousand pound notes were counted in.

"You lay me one hundred and fifty

thousand pounds to thirty thousand pounds," said Mr. Jones.

Douglas Campbell could make no reply, but Bob was prompt.

"That's the size of it," he said and, gripping Campbell's arm more closely, he led him, unprotesting and dazed, to the front of the stands.

"But—but you're mad!" gasped Campbell. "Great Heavens! We shall have to pay if it wins. You're mad, Brewer! You've ruined me!"

"Hush!" said Bob. "Look at the pretty race-horses lined up at the gate—they're off!"

The gate snapped and ten horses leaped forward like one. Bob was watching the race through his glasses and knew the worst after the horses had gone two furlongs. Right ahead of the field stretched Thotis, two lengths in front of everything. The race is easily described. Thotis led from start to finish and won in a canter by six lengths.

"Sit down," said Bob kindly; "this, I fear, is a slight shock for you."

Campbell could only shake his head helplessly and at that moment the jubilant Mandle Jones came toward them with long strides.

"How did he do it? Well, Campbell, old sport, I hope you like bookmaking. You can give me a check on your jolly old insurance company for the one hundred and fifty thousand pounds and I'll take my thirty thousand pounds back from you, if you please."

"Don't be precipitate, young sir," said Bob.

"What do you mean?" asked the other suspiciously.

"The boy, Seul, who rode your horse is a great pal of a dear old friend of mine, one Teddy Bolter, of whom you have never heard, but he is a gentleman who gets his money by fleecing the mugs."

"Here, I say," said Mr. Jones explosively, "I don't want to hear a lecture on jockeys."

"Come away, Brewer!" It was Douglas Campbell who had found his voice, but had found it very shaky. "I will arrange for that check for you, Mr. Jones, and—"

A man ran past from the direction of the weighing-room and shouted something.

"Hey, what's that?" exclaimed Mr. Jones.

"It sounded to me as though your horse had been disqualified for carrying short weight," said Bob, "I should go along and find out if I were you."

Mr. Jones raced back to the weighing-room to discover the sad truth. Thotis was disqualified. One of the leaden weights which had been placed in the saddle-bag to bring the jockey's weight up to that which the horse had to carry had mysteriously disappeared. They found it later in the afternoon on an unfrequented part of the field where the jockey had thrown it on his way down to the post, having extracted it whilst seemingly adjusting his stirrups.

"I went to Brussels last night," explained Bob on the way back to the hotel, "and found that the business of Burgen & Brock

had been sold earlier this year to Mr. Bolter for five thousand pounds. Bolter did not associate himself with the business, knowing that sooner or later he would catch a rich boob lured by the traditional honesty of the firm. You will probably find that it was Bolter who suggested this horse running. He has always one or two touts working for him, and certainly it was Bolter who got in touch with Mendleheimer and offered him this magnificent bet. We shall have to give that child back his thirty thousand pounds, I suppose."

"Well," said Mr. Campbell, "I suppose we shall. But wasn't I commission agent?"

"You were," said Bob, anticipating the next question, "but you get no commission except the commission of a good conscience and three minutes of excitement that should last you for life."

"I had that all right," said Mr. Campbell, shivering at the recollection.

The fifth adventure of the Policy Sleuth, "THE HEPPLEWORTH PEARLS," will appear next week.

Once a Plumber—

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Beware of the Bride," "Everything but the Truth," "Face Value," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOUBLE TRIANGLE.

"GAD! They're a fine, good-looking pair!" Mr. Parker muttered under his breath, as he glanced at the oncoming maids.

Fenelon permitted his gaze to dart in their direction for an instant.

"They are, aren't they?" he murmured. "Have you seen them, Hoban?"

"Not as yet," smiled the master of the house as he glanced around in the most casual fashion. "I have now, though. Yes, they're a decidedly presentable pair of young women and a big improvement on what we've been having lately."

"Country girls?" Fenelon inquired.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 25.

"I presume they are; I haven't taken down their pedigrees," Hoban replied. "They probably hail from somewhere within forty or fifty miles of here. Duncan's been gunning all over the State for help."

Fenelon dropped his voice a little lower.

"No two ways about it," said he, "it takes the open country to produce a real, normal young woman these days. Look at 'em! Not a suggestion of paint or powder or artificiality anywhere about 'em!'"

"And they're devilish good looking!" Parker asserted again, because an idea clung to him.

"Aren't they?" said Mr. Fenelon. "Nice, clear eyes—good color—pretty as pictures, both of 'em."

"Good-looking pair, eh?" Parker inquired of Joseph.

Joseph started and, with an effort that tore at his very fibers, managed a smile which, if vague, was reasonably human. Beyond that he could not go; some invisible force clutched at his throat and pressed like a steel collar. Hoban chuckled gently.

"Why ask the opinion of a man who's been engaged to an entirely different type of girl for only fifteen or twenty minutes?" he asked. "I'd be willing to wager something substantial that Blyn here could walk by Helen of Troy just now, with his nose in the air and the private opinion that she was just a trifle blowsy and out of date. Eh, Blyn?"

Joseph nodded again.

"You see?" said his host. "In his present state Blyn feels that an uncalled for frivolity like that remark doesn't even demand an answer!"

Joseph hardly heard. One lightning glance he directed toward William Wilson.

That fellow was indeed a wonder! Perhaps just a trifle paler than before, with perhaps the slightest exaggeration of ease in the manner with which he lighted his cigarette, William was only smiling languidly at something Fenelon had just said.

And, to the best of Joseph's guessing, that would be William's last smile for some time. Joseph, at least, understood the situation if William did not. Samuel Topp had done his worst by enlarging on the

horrible truth itself; the rest of the merry villagers, following that unfortunate pause of the Hoban car, had piled on details by the thousands. Now Mary and Kate, with courage and a refinement of cruelty, had somehow evaded their male relatives and were here in person, to confront the guilty pair and expose them for precisely what they were.

Two minutes hence, Fenelon and Parker would be laughing scorn at their recent business associates. Hoban himself, very likely, once the truth about them was public property, would eject them from the beautiful game in which he had permitted them to sit for a little while.

Joseph dared to look up. The two young women were not ten feet distant now, and the awful crash lay not ten seconds in the future. Joseph wondered dully just what form it would take. It would not be unlike Kate, in this extremity, to open the show with fireworks! She possessed the rather warm Beard temper, and it was not impossible that she would hurl her tray to the grass and, having thus claimed attention, point one finger at William and speak. Or it might be that the milder Mary, who could say a good deal, and say it well when pressed, would take the initiative. Joseph looked up again, and this time he did not whisk his eyes away quite so suddenly.

Because, while many things should have happened before this, actually nothing at all seemed in immediate prospect. Two stage women, with practise, might have rendered themselves more expressionless than were Kate and Mary at this moment; that two mere Olmford girls had accomplished such blankness all but stopped Joseph's breath. His gaze shot from Mary to Kate, and back to Mary again; between them they expressed not one single emotion.

Kate had placed her tray of food upon the table and whisked away the linen cover. Joseph stared stupidly at the array. He had attended afternoon teas before—at least three times, in fact, twice at the Baptist parsonage and once when Mrs. Dr. Ketcham celebrated her lean and studious daughter's return from college. They had had little cakes and things on these occa-

sions, and some biscuits, if his memory served. That tray over there, however, looked like something one would find in a big hotel. There were plates with tiny dots of salad; there were plates with little muffins, and other plates with toast and bijou tarts and little sandwiches. Over these Kate hovered, while Mary Foster arranged the tea things—and Hoban grunted and looked toward his home with:

"What's become of the girls?"

And still it had not happened! Joseph, trembling, shrank back into his chair, which grew larger and larger, and promised presently to swallow him completely. Somehow or other, since Fenelon had made a testy remark about not waiting for the girls, proceedings seemed to have started; somehow, Joseph had acquired a plate and a little joke of a napkin; somehow, for just an instant, he had looked straight into Mary Foster's eye without expiring. Nor had he learned much during that instant. What the eye lacked in melting affection it made up in complete inscrutability—albeit Joseph suspected that, for some remarkable reason, Mary Foster was still open to conviction. He had caught Kate's eye, too, and he had learned more. Deep within Miss Beard a fire blazed and roared, deep but not so deep that her eye failed to catch its sinister reflection.

"What's your name, if you please?" Hoban was saying, with a faint smile.

"Mary, sir!" Miss Foster replied demurely.

"That's a very pretty name," her employer commented, as he stirred his tea. "And yours?"

Miss Beard whisked about at him—and also turned instantly demure.

"Katherine, sir!" said she.

The millionaire nodded, and his smile grew dry.

"I trust, young women," he said, "that you'll settle down happily and contentedly here."

Joseph, with a shudder, perceived that a little shiver of suppressed anger was running through Kate.

"It's a little too soon to know whether you'll wish us, sir!" she stated.

Parker chuckled fatly; Hoban grinned

for a moment at his cup—and *still* it had not happened!

Why? What were they waiting for? If they meant to break loose and wreck things, why did they not get about it? Joseph looked at William and tried to draw strength from him. The attempt was a failure. Perchance the girls wished time to—Joseph executed another of his nervous jumps: a voice had floated from the house, and at the sound of it Miss Beard had stopped short for one second and stared in its direction. And the voice was the musical one of Miss Parker!

That was it! Both girls were busy at their tea things again; but that was what they were waiting for. Joseph's teeth ground together and his hands clenched frantically. Essentially the wait was over, because at this very moment Ethelyn and Gertrude were stepping down from the veranda.

On they came, as the gentlemen prepared to rise—on, more shimmeringly beautiful than ever, more obviously artificial, more—yes, even more flashy and unwholesome! This, at least, was Joseph's revised estimate of them, when viewed side by side with Mary Foster and Kate Beard; and having made it, he commended his soul to Providence and shut his eyes for a little.

"And then?"

"Headache?" Ethelyn queried, solicitously, from just beside him.

"Um—yes!" Joseph said thickly, as he opened his eyes.

"Come and have some tea," pursued Miss Fenelon, and her voice was a caress.

"I think—maybe I'd better—go upstairs and—"

"Oh, tea's the best thing in the world for a headache, Joe," remarked his latest fiancée, and led him, all shaky and limp and unresisting, to the settee.

They were side by side now. Over there William, whose brazen self-possession passed belief, had drawn his chair close to Miss Parker and was chatting amiably and confidentially, while Miss Parker dimpled and played with her spoon and, every so often, hurled glances at William that must have stopped his heart—while Kate, also, contemplating them from behind the group,

grew whiter and whiter and compressed her lips. From her clear, beautiful eyes it seemed to Joseph, tongues of fire shot in William's direction.

However, Kate was William's affair. What frightened the very wits out of Joseph was the infernal, eternal nearness of Mary Foster to himself. It appeared that Mary had looked after the wants of the others, and was ready to devote a little undesired attention to him. Mary, at any rate, with her white marble expressionlessness, was offering him something on a plate.

"Thank you—ah—no!" said Joseph.

"Try just one," Miss Fenelon suggested.

"Not—one!" Joseph managed.

And now, thank fortune, Mary had betaken herself elsewhere and—or no, she had not. She was offering Joseph something different on another plate.

"Thank you—er—no!" said Joseph.

"Oh, but just one!" Miss Fenelon insisted.

"Not—ah—one!" Joseph choked firmly.

That, he believed, was the end of their accursed food assortment. Now in the nature of things, Mary would have to keep her distance for a little, and let him try to think sanely, as to whether it were not better to get up and dumfound the gathering, save Hoban alone, by making a clean breast of the whole matter. This was more than the hint of an idea in Joseph's honest brain; given five relatively peaceful minutes it might perchance have bloomed into a full-blown dramatic scene and—was it possible that Mary had found still another plate? She had; she was approaching with it, and this time she was looking straight at Joseph with a gaze that had warmed considerably and her gentle bosom heaved visibly. The great chill descended upon Joseph once more.

"Thank you—ah—no!" he said.

"But—" Miss Fenelon began.

"No! Not—one!" Joseph echoed mechanically, as from a tomb!

Miss Fenelon's delightful laugh rang out.

"You silly boy!" she cried, bringing an unheeded start from Miss Foster. "Can't you say anything but 'Thank you, no,' and 'No, not one?'"

"Not—anything!" Joseph faltered.

"Oh, has it such a terrible headache?" Miss Fenelon fairly cooed at him. "Well, then, it really must eat just a little something and—"

"*It!*" escaped Mary Foster.

Miss Fenelon glanced up at her.

"Did you speak to me?" she asked, and, no answer coming, immediately turned her attention to Joseph once more. "Now, you're not to be naughty and stubborn, do you hear? You're to eat just a little something, young man—yes, you are! Yes, even if I have to feed you! That's just what I'll do, I think!" Miss Fenelon laughed brightly, and glanced at Mary in the chilly, aristocratic fashion she reserved for mere servants. "Er—you're new, aren't you? What's your name?"

Mary, for reasons of her own, failed to respond.

"Mary!" Hoban supplied, past a mouthful of sandwich.

"Mary, then—and you needn't be so embarrassed, Mary, even if you're not accustomed to things yet," Miss Fenelon pursued kindly. "We're all in the family here, in a way. Mary, will you let me have those muffins again, please?"

She waited. As an automaton, Mary Foster journeyed to the table and back again. Miss Fenelon, selecting a muffin herself, deposited it upon Joseph's vibrating plate.

"There!" she said contentedly. "Now—why, you've dropped it!"

"Dropped it?" Joseph echoed.

"Your muffin," said Miss Fenelon.

"You just let it slide down to the grass—after I gave it to you!"

"I—oh, yes—muffin!" Joseph said brilliantly, and stooped and picked it up—and dropped his plate and picked that up as well—and concluded the performance by dropping his muffin for the second time, and diving hysterically after it and, thereafter, retaining it in his closed fist, the while he gazed about in dumb agony!

"Why, Joe, you—you poor thing!" Miss Fenelon said. "Is it really so bad?"

"It's awful—awful! Horrible!" Joseph said. "It seems as if—"

"And you haven't any tea, either!"

Ethelyn remarked, quite impatiently, as she turned her annoyed gaze upon Mary Foster. "Tea for Mr. Blyn—*please!*"

Her modish little pump tapped exasperatedly upon the grass as she waited. Mary was returning with the cup now, and Miss Fenelon herself took it, and sweetened it with a sip of her own and then held it toward Joseph.

"It's just right—not too hot or too cold!" she announced. "And you must drink it. Come!"

She was waiting for him to bend and sip from her very hand! Joseph, trembling, sagged forward dizzily—and caught Mary's eye and jerked back quite violently.

"Lemme take it—lemme take it m'self!" he mouthed hoarsely.

He stretched out quivering hands. He snatched at cup and saucer. Horribly, insanely, did Joseph smile as he tried to bring them to his lips; and the cup tilted gracefully to one side and poured its contents, sparkling and steaming, to the grass; and then, as an afterthought apparently, ended by rolling after. Joseph stared at it incredulously as he gibbered:

"Looka that! Looka—that!"

Miss Fenelon, in genuine concern, caught his hand.

"Why, Joe, you're—you're not yourself at all. Mary, pick up that cup, if you will. I say, pick it up! Joe, there must be a doctor down in the little village. Don't you think—"

"No—no doctor!" Joseph just contrived. "This 'll—pass. Some time or other. Just let me—sit back and close my eyes for a couple of minutes!"

"You poor, poor boy!" Miss Fenelon murmured as she watched him.

So Joseph, this time, managed actually to sit back and close his eyes, and there was a respite which, possibly, saved him from an attack of acute mania. But the eyes were far from tightly closed. Through two slits they watched Mary as, with one dreadful, instantaneous stare in his direction, she picked up the cup and made her placid way back to the table.

Ah, and she meant to stand there for a little, which was another blessing. Joseph allowed his stricken gaze to travel toward

William and, a yard farther, toward Kate Beard.

Nonchalant as ever was William Wilson. He talked with Gertrude, and smiled and talked some more. Nonchalance, however, seemed absent from Miss Beard. She had attained a state of chalk whiteness now, with a brilliant red spot on either cheek, and she was endeavoring to signal William—and William consistently was ignoring her signals.

Oh—she was leaving now, was she? She had gathered up a plate or two and was speeding with them toward the mansion. Never a backward glance did Miss Beard vouchsafe the gathering, either, which impressed Joseph as odd; in the natural order of things, it seemed to him, Kate should have paused in the doorway and glared back at him who had once been her betrothed.

Instead, the door swung after her and she vanished. Joseph's brain, staggering along, paused, gripped at this phenomenon, spent a little time in spinning around and around it. Why had she gone? She was there to look at William. Why had she not remained to look at William? Why? Well, it was simple, to be sure!

How she had managed to keep her father from coming up here and slaying William in the first place was a mystery. Doubtless by keeping the whole affair from his attention. But now—*now* Kate had gone in to telephone full confirmation down to the simple little villagers and—

No! She hadn't, either. Kate was emerging from the mansion once more—full speed, excitement in her eye, lips parted.

"Oh, I beg pardon, Mr. Hoban!" she cried breathlessly.

"Eh? What? What's the trouble?" the lord of the place asked.

"A water pipe—it just broke, if you please, sir!" said Miss Beard. "I wondered if any of these gentlemen knew anything about such things? I think—"

She looked directly at William and, with a sudden access of intelligence, William bounced to his feet. Be it said that William did not step out of his character by any means, because he smiled amiably and

quite as if the thing was a lark—but just the same, he bounced!

"I do!" he cried gaily. "Made a hobby of busted pipes all my life! Where is it, please? No, the rest of you sit still! I'm an amateur at this stuff and it makes me nervous to have people stand around and make funny remarks when I'm trying my hand. Now!"

Miss Beard was hurrying houseward again. William strode after, and, for a moment, Joseph's eyes closed altogether, and he craved that his ears might close as well. For he understood. William was being lured to his doom. Somewhere in the mansion the blacksmith-father had been secreted. Miss Beard was holding the door open now; William passed through it and disappeared, and Kate after him. Joseph held his breath and waited for the one frightful shriek that would announce the passing of his old friend.

It failed to come.

Kate and William, just then, were in the side corridor on the kitchen side of the house, where all was still. There Kate stopped. Looking at her one might have guessed that Miss Beard had brought William into the house that he might hear certain definite sentiments of her own, and that, once alone with William, emotion had bested her and rendered her incoherent.

"What—what—" was all Kate said.

"Where's the pipe?" William inquired.

"Pipe? Pipe? There is no pipe? Didn't you understand even that?" Miss Beard exploded. "What—what do you mean by it?"

"By what?"

"Who is that bleached hussy?" Miss Beard demanded.

"If you mean Miss Parker, she isn't bleached," William answered coldly.

"She—who is she?"

"Why, she's the daughter of the rather stout gentleman who sits beside Mr. Hoban out there."

"That's not what I mean! You know perfectly well what I mean!"

"You flatter me. I haven't the slightest idea."

"I mean you—you know why I'm here!" Miss Beard stormed on.

"Nor that," smiled William. "You'll forgive me, but it seems to me that it would have been in better taste to remain away and—"

"How dare she pat your hand?" Miss Beard inquired further, and it was plain that relevancy was the last thing in her mind.

"Why not?" inquired William.

"Why *should* she?"

William sighed dreamily.

"She is my fiancée!" he announced.

This time at least, if that was what he desired, he had scored a direct hit! Miss Beard caught at her bosom and gasped aloud; she also tottered back until she leaned against the wall, and the steadying of her body seemed to steady her brain as well, for her voice was no longer hysterical, but only stunned, as she said:

"What—what do you say, Will?"

"I said that Miss Parker was my fiancée."

"You mean you—you think you're going to marry her?"

"I mean that I know I am, Kate. Please don't make it difficult."

"Don't—what?" breathed Miss Beard. "Is that what you were trying to tell me over the telephone?"

"Oh, no, that happened since," William said brightly.

"And you dared—"

"Kate!" William said sharply. "Suppose we have an end of this, here and now? I tried to make matters clear this morning and I seem to have failed. I'll try again. I'm sorry—Joe and I are sorry—if we're causing you girls any distress, but the time has come when we must—"

"You're—sober, too!" Miss Beard remarked. "I supposed of course when you phoned—yes, and when they said that you'd been riding through town with those women!—that this wealthy crowd were having a little sport with you! I supposed that they'd opened the cellar here and were just having fun!" pursued the lady, whose candor was as superb as her logic. "Oh, I know you never drank anything, but that seemed the only excuse—and you're queer and weak, and if they flattered you a little, you'd do almost anything to—"

"*That*," said William majestically, "is enough!"

His frown would have quelled more than a mere village maiden. Fastened upon her, second after second, it seemed to have quelled Miss Beard. Lips tight, she studied the junior partner of the plumbing concern for a long, long time.

"*That—is enough!*" she whispered.

Then she continued her study of William.

While out on the lawn, Joseph still waited and waited for the cry of agony that failed to break the summer calm. It was passing strange. He opened his eyes a little wider—and abruptly his concern about William ceased, and more immediate concern about himself took its place.

Miss Fenelon was holding his hand. He had not noticed it before, but she must have been holding it for some time. And Mary Foster was looking fixedly at them, and, knowing her so well, Joseph felt that she was about to speak, and to say something startling.

At the moment she was passing toward them around the table, with one of the smaller service trays—just, in fact, as Parker held up his teacup.

"Toast, Blyn! Toast!" he puffed. "It's usual to look at a man, at least, when he's proposing a toast, even in hot water!"

"Oh!" said Joseph, with his ghastly smile.

"Here it is, then, and I think it's rather neat. I just thought it up, in fact," Mr. Parker continued, quite dramatically. "To Ethelyn and—and Joe! May they have the gayest wedding, the biggest—"

It may indeed have been neat; as to that there is no possible telling, for Mr. Parker's toast was rudely shattered, even in its opening line.

Mary, halting as if stopped by a bullet, had come to a sudden standstill. Her dilating eyes flashed at Mr. Parker and then at Ethelyn and Joseph—and Ethelyn smiled entrancingly, and Joseph's horrible grin widened and widened!

"*You're Ethelyn?*" Mary demanded, pointing at Miss Fenelon.

"I—of course! How in the world dare you—"

Nor was she permitted to speak farther, for the tray dropped from Mary's hands and a piercing shriek left Mary's lips—and then a moan, as Mary closed her eyes and fell squarely upon her back, to lie there, motionless, apparently unbreathing, another martyr to man's perfidy!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING.

NO better evidence is to be found of the complete mental paralysis which had attacked Joseph this last quarter-hour, than in the fact that he remained perfectly still, second after second, with poor little Mary lying there almost at his feet.

"Here—upon my word!" Hoban gasped.

"Gad! What is it?" Mr. Parker demanded, lowering his cup.

"What's the matter with the girl?" Mr. Fenelon asked, in blank amazement.

"Why, the—the poor creature!" Gertrude observed, with equal blankness.

"She—she fainted!" Miss Fenelon stated.

And still Joseph had not moved.

Hoban was stirring. Miss Parker was stirring, too, carefully preparing to rise and then stoop beside the victim without disarranging her toilet.

"We—we'll have to do something!" she said brightly.

"I should say we would have to do something!" Hoban grunted, and laid aside his plate. "I can't understand it. Duncan has the most explicit orders to be certain of a woman's good health before she hires her for this outfit. I—confound it, anyway! I'll have Simms get the chauffeur and carry her in! I—she—she isn't dead, is she?"

He was rising. Another moment and he would have started for the house—and Joseph came to life with a crash! His past was flashing before him, even as he darted from his chair; Joseph saw himself as a criminal of the very first water, as a cad, a scoundrel and, likely enough, a murderer. He had an impression, too, that his heart

had just broken, although he was permitted little time for analysis on this count.

Joseph, in fact, was on his knees beside Mary before any of these ideas took really complete shape. His powerful arms were slipping under her limp form and lifting it easily.

"Sit still!" Joseph choked. "I'll take her in and see that she's properly cared for!"

"That's good of you, Blyn," Hoban said apologetically. "Sorry the girl's made such an infernal nuisance of herself."

"Say! If you—" burst from Joseph.

"What?"

"Nothing!" gulped Joseph, as he stalked away. "Nothing—matters now!"

The little figure, so firm and warm and young, sagged in his arms. Joseph choked afresh. Really all that he asked just now was that Mary revive for two minutes before she actually died, that he might pour into her ear certain thoughts that crashed about within him. After that, without a word to any one, it was Joseph's firm intent to step out back somewhere and make an end of himself with the first fitting tool that came to hand.

But if she would only come around long enough to hear him, to forgive him, to kiss him good-by—a tear rolled down Joseph's stricken cheek as he kicked open the door and entered the accursed Hoban home with his burden.

Kate and William were standing over there, he perceived mistily, just standing there and staring at one another. Both of them started at the sight of him—William to stare, Kate to run toward him with a flattering cry of:

"What have you done to her? You—you little beast! Did you strike Mary?"

"Strike her!" Joseph gasped. "Kate, if I could only—"

The girl in his arms was stirring. He caught a little sob, and his heart leaped, for she still lived. He turned to see if her eyes had opened. They had. They were staring at Joseph, and the fire behind them was kindling; and now Mary was struggling, suddenly and startlingly, and crying:

"Oh! Oh!"

Wild, immeasurable joy set Joseph's

pulses to throbbing crazily. She lived! She lived and—so far, at any rate, she had said nothing to indicate that Joseph might not be forgiven. This, at least, was Joseph's interpretation of Mary's few remarks. Kate and William, over there, seemed to have been having unpleasant words, but dear little Mary—Joseph's arms tightened bearishly about her. It seemed to Joseph that he would never let her go again, and that she would never permit herself to be released.

In this, however, he was wrong. That momentary passiveness on Mary's part came altogether from the fact that, in her bewildered condition, he had all but squeezed the breath from her slender body and rendered her helpless. She was recovering now and very swiftly. Mary, in point of fact, was kicking violently and, with both slim hands against his face, was pushing in a positive fashion, the while augmenting her recent statement with:

"Let me go! Put me down! Let me go, I tell you! How dare you—you lay a finger on me?"

Joseph's grip relaxed a little. There was a swirl and a last harsh, unfriendly push. Then Mary was upon her feet, backing away from him, her eyes dilating with an emotion that was certainly not abounding love.

"Listen, Mary!" Joseph cried, because this was to be the end of all the insanity, and he meant to unburden his conscience, and then, if Mary would but permit him to do so, to crawl home on his knees before her! "Mary, dear, I—"

"Don't speak to me!"

"I must! I—"

"Very well, then—do! Just this once!" Mary Foster flamed. "Tell me one thing: is it true that you're engaged to that creature?"

"In a way—maybe—"

"Yes or no?"

"I can't answer yes or no, because—"

"Yes or no!" Mary insisted. "Answer me!"

"Yes—I suppose I'll have to say. But—"

"Oh!" cried Mary Foster, and shrank back against Kate. "Oh! Oh!"

"But actually—" Joseph began eagerly.

"Don't speak one more word to her. Do you hear?" Miss Beard put in.

"I will, because—"

"You will not, for any reason in the world, for if you do I'll claw your eyes out!" flashed quite astonishingly from Kate and she stood squarely before her friend, preventing an approach which Joseph was about to make. "I'll do what little talkings to be done here!"

Her glittering eyes whisked from Joseph to William and back again. William only smiled rather cynically. Joseph shook, partly in anger, partly in terror.

"You're a splendid pair of men—a wonderfully fine pair of men!" Miss Beard observed, controlling herself. "But you're smart, when it comes to deception; I'll give you that much credit. I've never had a suspicion, nor has Mary. We've always believed that you were both everything that was good and honest and true—and yet this has been going on for weeks or months!"

"It hasn't!" Joseph cried. "I swear—"

"Don't lie to me, please!" Miss Beard hissed. "People don't become—oh, I can't believe it even now—people don't become engaged in an hour or two! You've been living your ordinary lives until whatever you've been working out here was ready; if it failed, you had us to fall back on, I suppose. If it didn't, we were to be cast aside like a pair of old shoes—just as you've cast us aside!"

Her bosom heaved. Her hands worked. One saw that it was only with a mighty effort that Miss Beard kept those hands from reverting to the purely elemental. As a moment for smooth, placating speech, this one did not appeal to Joseph. He held his peace. Miss Beard smiled terribly.

"Please consider, then, that we've been cast aside. We couldn't believe a word of what we heard; we came here without mentioning the thing at home, just to see with our own eyes. Well, we've seen and—I think, when we go home, we may not be quite so reticent about you. And I think, too, that humble and unimportant as we are, some of our men may possibly have a word to say on the way you've acted!"

She turned to Mary Foster.

"There's nothing more we care to learn here, is there?"

"Nothing that I—want to know," Mary said with difficulty.

"But there's something you'll have to hear, Mary!" Joseph insisted, with much force. "And that is this: appearances may—"

Miss Beard whirled upon him.

"Joe Blyn," she panted, "do you want me to scream until every fat, overfed beast of a man—every painted and powdered thing in this den!—comes running? Do you want me to lose myself and—and tear the very flesh from that smug, lying face of yours?"

"No!" Joseph faltered, with perfect honesty.

"Then don't you dare say one more word, to her or to me!" Miss Beard suggested, and caught her friend's arm. "Come!"

There was apparently a closet in the angle, down there at the end of the corridor by the door which Joseph assumed led to the kitchen section of the home. Miss Beard, at any rate, snatched open a door, snatched out two long coats and two hats, snatched off her smart little white cap and threw it to the floor.

Joseph started forward. William gripped him and Joseph ceased starting forward; as a matter of fact, little force was necessary to stay his progress just then. Limply he watched the two young women, breathing audibly as they slipped into their coats; limply and vacantly, he stared at them as they turned and swept by the faithless pair and crossed to the far side of the house.

It was the main veranda to which they stepped—along it and down the little flight at the farther side, and then, swiftly, across the perfect grass. They were heading for the gateway on that side, Joseph deduced, and then they would cross the wooded patch and—

"Gad!" said William, with a faint smile, for he liked the word as puffed by Parker, his future uncle-in-law. "We escaped something, eh?"

"What?"

"Temper!" William said briefly. "We

missed a whole lifetime of just that stuff by the breadth of a hair."

Joseph gripped at the saner portion of his mind, so lately in complete suspension.

"Bill, let's get after 'em!" he pleaded. "Let's catch 'em before they can get home and—and make up! We can do that, if we just have a chance to—"

"Make up what?" William demanded harshly.

"Everything! Be friends with 'em and—and just go back home and try to make amends and—we can do it, Bill, if we catch 'em!" Joseph said brokenly.

William laughed coldly and tightened his grip.

"You poor, weak-kneed fool!" he remarked. "I believe you would, at that. Stand still a while, Joe. You'll get over it."

He laid his other hand upon Joseph, too, rendering a sudden break quite impossible—and Joseph turned weak and unresisting. Turning weak seemed to be the most successful thing he had done to-day; he set his teeth and tried to gather strength, mental, moral, and physical. The effort ended in failure. William, whistling through his teeth, was smiling down on him.

"You know what her—father—and Mary's brothers 'll do?" Joseph said hoarsely.

"Nothing!"

"They'll come up here and skin us alive, and they'll be doing the right thing!"

"You're excited, Joe," smiled William. "They'll never even contemplate such a stunt. They're reasonably sane and practical, if the girls are not. Oh, it's too bad, of course—all of it. I'm as sorry as you are, in a way; but it's all over now, Joseph. The one unpleasant thing that could happen has happened; we haven't a thing to do now but enjoy life."

He yawned! His mouth shut again and he listened.

"I *thought* that was Hoban's voice!" he remarked, as a mumble came from the direction of the library. "Gad! I hope Mary didn't break up the little tea-party."

He sauntered forward, the last earthly care gone from his shoulders, to meet the group so evidently approaching. He

paused, then, with a shocked little exclamation, for Mr. Hoban, who walked between Fenelon and Parker, was dead-white of cheek!

"I say!" cried William. "I hope the girls—"

"Girl!" Hoban barked at him, ever so strangely. "What girl?"

"The one who fainted and—"

"What? Oh, the maid—yes! One did faint, didn't she? I'd forgotten it, Wilson. She's—er—all right, I trust?"

"Perfectly."

"Then—" the lord of the mansion stopped and gazed at him, frowning. "Don't mind me, either of you. I'm—er a trifle upset. I've had some bad news on the long distance."

"His brother!" Fenelon supplemented, with peculiar sharpness. "He's very ill in Chicago."

"Gad—yes! Likely to die at any minute!" Mr. Parker added.

"I'm frightfully sorry to hear that!" William gushed. "I wish—"

"You mustn't concern yourself with it!" Hoban said quickly, and to Joseph, at least, it appeared that the gentleman was regaining his perfect self-mastery, temporarily wrecked by the shock. "No, I insist on that, Wilson. I never permit my personal troubles to interfere with business."

"But we're done with business for this day," William smiled.

"I know. I said that, didn't I?" Hoban muttered. "Well, it was my mistake, Wilson. Once you've plunged into the bigger type of business you're never done with it, day or night. That's—er—what I wanted to say to you just when they called me to the telephone. The Sandia Copper Company!"

"Our company!" William beamed.

"Your company!" said Hoban. "Exactly. Matters are coming to a head faster than I supposed; a wire came just as you left the table out there. Some of our Middle West connections are likely to arrive tomorrow for a conference, and you'll have to shine at the conference, both of you. And you'll have to know what you're talking about. I hate to bore you with any

more of it to-day, but the girls rather insist on our being in evidence after dinner, you know, and I'll have to ask you to learn the A B C's of Sandia Copper *now!*"

"We're very ready to do that!" announced William.

"Come this way!" his host directed briefly.

With dusk gathering thickly outdoors, and the big library in heavy shadow save for the brilliant spot that was Hoban's reading-lamp on the table, it seemed to Joseph that every possible statement about copper had been made.

They had been in there for rather more than an hour now—or was it rather more than a day?—and through that period Hoban had talked incessantly, mostly at William, occasionally at Joseph. Native copper, pyrites, malachite, tenorite, had torn their way through the one-sided conversation; Lake Superior had been mentioned over and over again, and a number of other localities as well; Hoban, Joseph believed, had delivered a masterly dissertation on smelting and another on electrolytic copper. They sounded masterly, at any rate, albeit when they were quite concluded, Joseph's personal stock of information was precisely what it had been before: copper was the brownish metal, which cost like fury these last years, and which one used now and then for washers, for lining tanks, and infrequently, in the form of wire, for doing a little electrical job.

The weird thing was that, if William actually did not understand, he was giving the world's one perfect imitation of a man assimilating information rather faster than it was hurled at him! William nodded assent until it seemed to his old friend that his head must have worn its joint down to the danger point; William cleared his throat importantly, every so often, and said: "Yes, yes! Of course!" or: "Gad! Is that so?"

But out of all the astonishing jumble "Ten Star" seemed to recur and recur, until at last, by dint of considerable concentration, Joseph got track of the term, as it were, and picked up a hint here and a hint there from the immediate context.

"Ten Star," apparently, was Hoban's favorite mine; he was unable to say enough in its favor. His statements to William, in connection with this Ten Star affair, passed from copper ore to refined gold, in the shape of currency; he mentioned sums that began in the hundreds of thousands and leaped into millions and then into tens of millions! He waved his hands at William and bade him state that he understood all about Ten Star in particular, because this conference to-morrow was likely to bear more upon Ten Star than upon any other of the company's properties. William, with a grave frown, admitted that all was perfectly clear to him, and Hoban turned to Joseph and asked if there might not be a question or two he cared to propound on the subject of Ten Star.

Far indeed was he from catching Joseph Blyn. Joseph, beyond all things, was the last man to argue the wrong side of any person's particular hobby. This Ten Star thing was Hoban's hobby, so Joseph contrived a bland smile and announced that, so far as concerned himself, not a detail remained that needed any further discussion.

Quite as he had expected, this attitude pleased Mr. Hoban. With a long, deep sigh, the gentleman sat back in his chair and smiled weakly at them.

"I've probably never said quite so much about copper in so short a time," said he. "However, if you've grasped the thing so that you're able to talk impressively, it's time well spent, and—what o'clock is it, anyway?"

"Just seven," came from Fenelon's corner.

"Is that possible!" Hoban gasped, as he left his chair. "We'll have to dress like mad, then. Wilson—Blyn!"

"Yes?" said William, as he stretched.

"Er—Simms has laid out your things, I believe. He'll attend to you."

Joseph shuddered. They dressed for dinner here! Be it not said in so many words that Joseph did not possess evening clothes of his own; yet in the interest of accuracy it may be admitted that upon those two other occasions when formal evening clothes had seemed necessary—the high school commencement and the night he had ushered

at the church play—he had been forced to borrow such minor articles as coat, trousers, and a vest from a friend in West Prindle.

William, though, was smiling contentedly. He kept on smiling as he led Joseph straight up-stairs. He was smiling even when they entered what was evidently to be their suite and found Simms waiting for them.

The valet glanced up and sighed.

"I understood, sir, that your baggage hasn't yet arrived," said he.

"Not yet," William assented as he removed his coat and tossed it to the bed.

"Then the shirts and the ties and collars will have to do, sir, I take it? They will, I'm sure. The other things seemed to fit so excellent."

"Oh, they'll do, of course," William responded and hummed a pretty little tune as he picked up the nearer dress-coat. "Gad! This looks rather nice."

"There's nothing better in the world, sir," Simms said solemnly.

William stared at him.

"See here!" he cried. "Hoban hasn't been sending to the city and getting new clothes for us, has he? This coat's perfectly new."

"In a way, yes, sir," Simms agreed. "Mr. Arthur wore it just three times, if memory serves."

"And then?" came from Joseph.

"He refused to wear it again, sir," sighed the valet. "He refused to permit me to pack it when he left for Europe."

"Why?"

The valet started and hesitated. Some few seconds, with one thin hand folded upon the other, he gazed at the rather elaborate electrolier; and then he smiled wanly, with:

"I thought, of course, you might have heard, sir, being intimate friends of the family—and the young gentlemen as well, I take it? It was a bit curious—just a joke of the young gentlemen, to be sure; they've a great way of joking among themselves—it was really a bit curious, to my mind, but Mr. Arthur had a name for that suit."

"A name?"

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Wilson. And Mr. Herbert, not to be outdone, I presume, found a name for his as well," Simms smiled

mournfully. "They were delivered on the same day, you know, and the young gentlemen wore them on the same occasions."

"Mr. Herbert's is the one I'm to wear, eh?" Joseph hazarded.

"If you'll be so good, sir."

"And what was the name he had for it?" Joseph pursued further.

The valet gazed at him for a moment and appeared to hesitate again.

"Well, beg pardon, sir," said he, "but the somewhat odd name Mr. Herbert chose for that suit was 'Disaster.'"

"What?"

"Quite so, sir—Disaster."

Joseph swallowed the same old persistent something which had afflicted his throat earlier in the day and which seemed now to have returned.

"What did the other fellow call the other suit?" he asked bluntly.

"The one Mr. Wilson will be wearing, sir?" said Simms and, after a momentary glance at William, considered the electrolier once more. "Well, that one, sir—I beg pardon for mentioning it; possibly I should not—that one Mr. Arthur named 'Sudden Death'!"

CHAPTER XV.

BUYERS.

"WHAT was that?" William rasped. "If you please, sir," murmured Simms, and there was the faintest hint of reproof in his tone, "I spoke to Mr. Blyn, sir."

"About this coat?"

"About the whole suit, sir," said the valet. "About both suits, in fact, their histories being linked, as one might say. You see, Mr. Wilson, Piffin delivered both the suits at the same time and—ah, poor, jolly fellow that he was! I recall so well—"

"That's the tailor who died of a broken heart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't recall anything about him!" William barked. "Let him rest in peace. Now—as to these clothes! There are horrible memories connected with every stitch in them, I suppose?"

The valet winced and bowed solemnly.

"One might put it in that way, sir," said he. "On the first occasion that Mr. Arthur wore that suit, sir, it was his great misfortune to witness the horrible injuring of a small child. He spent a matter of two weeks or more in court as a result and—"

"And the child, of course, died?"

"I believe so, sir. When next he wore it, the hotel in which Mr. Arthur was dining caught fire and—"

"And everybody was burned to death?" William broke in again.

"No, sir," the valet corrected, with gentle dignity. "There were no fatalities on that occasion, sir, but Mr. Arthur's escape from a falling beam was so marvelously narrow that three of the newspapers on the following morning mentioned it as a miracle!"

"Yes? And now tell us about the third time he wore it."

"Ah, sir!" said Simms, and rolled his eyes slightly. "Ah, on that—"

"Or let me tell you!" William interrupted. "He saw a train wrecked; there were a thousand people on board and every one of them was hashed into mince-meat! yes?"

"No—if you please," said the valet. "But you guessed rather close, sir. It chanced to be a heavy motor-truck, loaded with workmen returning to their homes, and the bridge they were crossing gave way and—"

Joseph, despite a certain effort to smile superciliously, was peculiarly white. William was distinctly red.

"All right. I came near enough to it!" he snapped. "The whole idea is that every time they put 'em on they had horrible bad luck: is that it?"

"Why, yes, sir," Simms murmured, and glanced at him most peculiarly. "That was the thought I sought to convey, Mr. Wilson. They—er—insisted that the worst kind of luck followed any one who wore those clothes. Mr. Arthur, in fact, said at one time that if he ever found himself tempted to get into that suit he'd have—er—'a hunch,' he called it, sir—and run like mad! I've felt he was right, sir!"

"Say!" Joseph cried. "Just what do you mean by that?"

The gloomy and peculiar glance traveled to Joseph and grew still more peculiar! Simms drew a deep breath.

"It may be that I'd be warranted, sir, in being a trifle more explicit and—" he began softly.

"Listen to me, Simms," William snarled angrily. "We've had all the crape-hanging we need! Get out!"

"If I may say, sir—"

"Well, you may not! Git!"

"If you please, Mr. Wilson, I—"

William, having snatched off his necktie, tossed it to the bed and strode down upon the valet.

"Hard to take a hint, hey?" he barked.

"For some, sir," murmured the valet.

"Then I'll be a little bit explicit myself!" thundered William. "You see that door? You've got five seconds to walk through it. After that, I'll throw you through it!"

"Well, that, sir, I'm sure will not be necessary," said Simms as he stepped soundlessly away.

"Wait a minute, Bill!" Joseph said feverishly. "I want—"

"Keep on moving, Simms!" snarled William. "He's not speaking to you!"

He pointed. Simms did not pause; neither did he look back as Joseph started in his direction and was caught by William. Simms, in fine, passed through the door with a good two seconds to spare and closed it after him, and they heard his light step moving away down the corridor.

"Get him back, Bill!" gasped Joseph.

"What the—"

"Yes! Don't chase him like that! He was trying to tell us something!"

"And I didn't give him the chance!" William smiled unpleasantly. "He had to leave all his disasters unfinished."

"I didn't mean that. He didn't either. He was trying to warn us, Bill, about something!"

"About what?"

"That's what I don't know. That's what I want to find out!" the senior partner all but panted. "He knows something or other that we don't know and he was trying to tell us in his own way. Possibly he was afraid that somebody was listening and—"

"All right—all right! That'll do!" Wil-

liam said wearily. "Sit down and calm down, d'ye hear?"

"But, Bill, didn't you notice the way he was trying to say—"

"No, I didn't and you didn't either; but I don't doubt for a second that you thought you did—and I'm not going to bawl you out for it just because your brain's a little weak and flighty."

"But, Bill—"

"Now, listen!" William commanded. "I'm a patient guy, Joe. You know that. I'll put up with a lot from you that I wouldn't stand from anybody else. You know that, too, because you've seen me doing it all day. But if you're going to pull a fit of hysterics every time anybody sneezes or coughs or says a word you can't understand—"

"Bill—"

"I know! But you hear what I have to say. This is where you stop—see? This is the last time you blow up, Joe. I've done more for you to-day than you've ever done for yourself in your whole life. If it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here! You wouldn't be an officer in one of the biggest, swellest concerns in the country! You wouldn't be engaged to about as fancy a little pippin as ever happened. *Would you?*"

"No, Bill. I guess not," Joseph conceded.

"Then let it go at that and, from this second on, *act natural*. Get the idea?"

"Yes, Bill," sighed his old friend. "But all the same I think that valet was trying to—"

"Did he put the studs in your shirt?" William asked, and one saw that the whole subject had been dropped.

"Eh? Yes."

"So he did in mine, Joe," mused the junior partner. "Better get a little speed into it, old man. We don't want to keep their dinner waiting. If you want a hand anywhere, shout!"

"You know how to—to get into all this?" Joseph mumbled.

"I know everything, kid!" William informed him, and took to whistling gayly. "Don't forget to change the things in the pockets, Joe; we don't know how honest that Simms bird is. Take Hoban's check

along and whatever loose money you have—and drop that watch into your pocket, chain and all, by the way. Shake her up, Joseph!"

For his own part, whistling still, he dressed with really remarkable speed. Joseph, watching him, plodded after with commendable success—and so, in a bare quarter hour, they stood perfectly attired for dinner. But while, detail for detail, their various borrowed elegancies were virtually duplicates, there was something distinctly different about William when he examined himself in the long mirror.

William, indeed, was the person in the traditional immaculate evening clothes. Joseph was merely a rather drooping human on whom the same sort of garments seemed to sag and mourn.

This was a contrast not lost upon William, yet it did not exasperate him; rather did it render William kindly, for he laid a soothing, cheering hand on the shoulder of his old friend as he said:

"You're all ready?"

"Yes, Bill."

"Then square your shoulders and smile, old man. This stuff all comes natural to me; you'll get used to it, though—take my word for that. Two or three days hence you'll be trotting around just as nicely as I do now." He treated himself to a farewell stare in the mirror. "I'm pretty good, Joe?"

"You're a wonder, Bill!"

"Get me started and nothing on earth can stop me; you're beginning to realize that now," the junior partner observed complacently. "Hoban's a great little picker of men, Joe; I'll say that for him. All I hope is that, sooner or later, I'm not pitted against him in the market, in one way or another. I'd hate to be in a position of having to ruin Hoban to save my own hide!"

"I don't believe you ever will be," Joseph said sanely.

"You never can tell, Joe," William murmured with a grave smile. "Let's go down now."

Quite impressively he led the way to the great staircase and paused to listen. It was William's doubtless commendable desire that the young women of the little house

party should be there to witness his descending; yet, apparently, this was not to be gratified. There was a mumble of voices from somewhere below—from the little alcovelike room across from the drawing-room, William thought—but there was no feminine note in the mumble.

William coughed, by way of announcing their imminent appearance. The cough worked quite magically, for with a stirring of feet, Hoban hurried through the doorway of the little room and came up to them, two steps at a time.

Plainly he was rather excited. He stopped them short and whispered:

"Wilson, I'm devilish sorry. I thought we were to have a quiet evening. There's more business!"

"Ah?" William smiled placidly. "Copper business?"

"Yes, and big copper business! Our people have come on from the Middle West and instead of having the decency to wait for to-morrow, they've come out here to-night. You'll have to talk to them. That's best, I think. You're president of the company and your words will make an impression on them."

"Oh, that's all right," William assured him. "What do they want to talk about?"

"Buying some of the mines outright, I believe. I haven't been able to pump them, Wilson. They want to talk to the man up top and I've promised that they shall. Confound it, anyway! It means that we will have to delay dinner for another hour, or perhaps longer."

William smiled brightly and even winked at his benefactor.

"If it means a million or two in our pockets," said the world's most remarkable plumber, "we can afford to let dinner cool. You leave it to me, Hoban; I'll settle it all in jig time and settle it right!"

"I mean to leave it to you," the millionaire person whispered in conclusion. "You're likely to be in difficulties, now and then. Take your cues from me, Wilson. Watch for 'em!"

"I'll do that!" William rejoined cheerily. "Bring on the victims!"

He sauntered on, humming lightly, with Hoban on one side and Joseph on the other

—and of the two it would have been difficult to say whether Hoban or Joseph seemed the more concerned about him. Certain it is that, as they crossed the lower hall, Hoban's gaze burned into one side of William and Joseph's into the other.

And need they have concerned themselves thus about the manner in which William would meet the important visitors? They need not!

William entered the room as a prince enters his own drawing-room, looked about with kindly tolerance, nodded to Fenelon and Parker, who were also staring at him, and then smiled at the two plain, strong-featured gentlemen in the other corner, just rising now to greet him.

"Mr. Wilson, our president—and Mr. Blyn, our treasurer," the head of the house was saying suavely. "Mr. Bowers and Mr. Grayson, of whom I spoke."

Hands were shaken. With a kindly gesture, William motioned the visitors back to their seats, nodded Joseph into the farther chair, himself settled gracefully and crossed his legs.

"Well, gentlemen?" said William.

Bowers, the one with the sharp blue eyes, smiled rather timorously at him.

"Mr. Wilson, I'm a—a man of few words," he stated. "You probably have an idea of why we're here?"

"I prefer to hear you tell me," laughed William.

"I'll do that! We're here on the Ten Star matter."

"Ah?" said William, and crossed his legs the other way.

"We want a flat, direct statement from you, sir," added Mr. Grayson.

"About the actual Ten Star properties," said Bowers, "and the stock issued against them, of course. Just how much of that stock has been issued?"

"Why—ah—" said William.

"Not more than five million dollars worth, Mr. Wilson?" Hoban put in.

"Um—well—possibly a trifle more," said William.

"More?" Bowers echoed.

"Just a little, perhaps," said William. "I'd hesitate at making a very exact statement to—er—strangers!"

"Well, 'strangers' is exactly what we don't want you to feel us to be," Bowers said quickly. "You've been advised in advance of the people we represent?"

"Yes, of course!" Hoban said quickly, and William wondered quite petulantly why he frowned.

"Why, of course! Of course!" William echoed.

"Then you know we're not philanthropists," Bowers pursued with a sly little wink at William. "You know we're not buying this—if we do take it over—for the benefit of the dear public."

"If I had any such suspicion, I should not be talking business with you," William said unexpectedly, and while it impressed him as a fitting and harmonious remark it seemed to agitate Hoban queerly.

"Good enough! We understand one another then," Mr. Bowers laughed. "Let's drop all the fencing and come down to brass tacks. Have you sold much of that stock, Mr. Wilson?"

"Very little, I think Mr. Wilson said," Hoban said.

"We have some left," William concluded.

"Suppose we were to take all that remains over, for cash, at say ten points below the present market?"

"Well?"

"Before doing so, we should expect an exact statement from you, Mr. Wilson, as to the precise, actual value of this Ten Star property. As between man and man, is it worth anything like five million dollars?"

"It seems to me, sir, that that question is a distinct affront to Mr. Wilson!" Hoban cried. "Mr. Wilson, I'd refuse to—"

"Wait a second!" said the president of the copper company for, in spite of his best efforts, he was growing excited. "These people want to buy out the Ten Star stuff and they want to clean up on it. That's the idea?"

"Decidedly!" said Bowers.

"Buy us out at the figure you named and you won't lose a cent!" William cried with a prodigious wink of his own.

"That means that the property's worth considerably less than five?" Bowers cried quite eagerly.

"Does it mean that it actually isn't worth much of anything?" his associate asked with a queer laugh.

"Will it affect your proposition if I tell you the whole truth?" William inquired mysteriously.

"Not one bit!"

"Hi-ho!" smiled William.

"Will you deny that it's worth a great deal less than *one* million?" Bowers laughed boisterously.

"I'd hate to!" chuckled William Wilson.

A rather contented sigh came from Mr. Bowers. William glanced at Mr. Hoban for approval; strangely enough he found the Hoban face a perfect blank.

Bowers was scribbling on a paper which rested on his knee.

"Of course, we've never met before," said he. "For all my actual knowledge you may be the Governor of this State or the man who owns the local trolley line. I have the assurance of these gentlemen that you *are* the Mr. Wilson who is president of the Sandia Copper Company?"

"Oh, most certainly!" Hoban cried suddenly and it seemed that Fenelon and Parker, in the same second, were corroborating him.

"And Mr. Blyn here is the treasurer of the company?"

"That is the office Mr. Blyn holds," Hoban added distinctly.

"Good enough then. There's a memo in the roughest possible form," said the blue-eyed visitor. "Will you sign it and have Mr. Blyn sign it, please?"

Again William glanced at Mr. Hoban. The blankness, were that possible, had increased. Lazily, William reached for the paper and scanned it; it was, apparently, only a statement that they, as officers, agreed to sell all Sandia stock in their possession at a price ten points below the opening of to-morrow's market. William, then, accepting the fountain pen Mr. Bowers offered, wrote his name and passed the slip to Joseph. Joseph, not so steadily, added his signature—and the paper was back in Bowers's hands and Grayson was speaking.

"Well, I say—you know, it's all right, of course, but you're going it rather blindly.

Bowers, it seems to me," he said protestingly. "This informal thing's well enough, but I'd like some definite documentary assurance that Mr. Wilson and Mr. Blyn actually are what they are and have what they have to sell! I'm a bit finicky, I suppose, but—you can arrange that in the formal way, Mr. Wilson?"

"To-morrow," William smiled.

"No, now!" Grayson insisted.

William glanced at Hoban. Hoban was smiling, much as a polite marble statue might have smiled.

"You have quite a quantity of documents in my study," he suggested. "You might satisfy Mr. Grayson with those, I fancy. Will you care to look them over, sir, if Mr. Wilson is willing?"

"I'd like to!" said Grayson.

"Well, Mr. Wilson's willing," chuckled William.

"This way, if you please."

They were rising, all of them. William rose, too, and motioned Joseph to follow. They were strolling into the Hoban library now and, in his heart of hearts, William knew that he had done well. As to just what Ten Star was worth, as a block, his memory seemed a trifle hazy; however, he had succeeded in selling it for a good bit more than it was worth, or Hoban would have stopped him.

And there you have the whole secret of business success—to sell a given thing for a good bit more than it is worth! This bright thought William framed and mentally coddled for a precious second or two. Then his pleased attention turned to the visitors, who seemed to be deep over certain papers which Hoban had produced from a drawer somewhere or other.

Only their backs were visible from here, but their backs expressed the most intense interest. They were muttering audibly, too, as their eyes passed from sheet to sheet.

"Fact!" came from Bowers's direction. "There are four assignments, all with their signatures."

There was a pause.

"Letter—dated four months ago—signed Wilson!" came cryptically from Grayson.

"Here are receipts," Bowers mumbled on. "They seem—o-ho! You've taken on a little of this Sandia stock, too, have you, Mr. Hoban?"

"Just a little," Hoban explained, and there came to his lips a bland, saintlike smile that fairly riveted Joseph's attention. "I felt that anything sponsored by Mr. Wilson must be quite all right and above board."

"You've known him for years, have you?"

"For a very brief period," said the millionaire, and the saintliness increased. "But Mr. Wilson is one of those men one need not know for very long before trusting him implicitly."

"You believe that, eh?"

"I know it, sir!" said Mr. Hoban indignantly.

His very attitude was a challenge, too. William warmed—and then looked curiously at the callers. They had straightened up now; they were facing one another.

"Enough?" Grayson queried.

"Enough?" Bowers laughed harshly. "Well, I guess yes!" And then he turned to William Wilson. "All right, Mr. Wilson. We've got you good. You're under arrest!"

"What was that?" William smiled.

"I said you were pinched!" added the astonishing Mr. Bowers. "Pinched! is what I said."

"For what—er—"

"For peddling the stock of a crooked copper-mine through the mails, Wilson!" Mr. Bowers explained wearily. And without the slightest real provocation he whisked a long, offensive-looking revolver from its hidden shoulder holster. "That'll do you! Never mind looking at the window, Wilson. You don't have to jump out; I'll show you how to walk!"

From Joseph Blyn one small, terrified shriek issued. He turned abruptly to the door—and Mr. Grayson, acquiring him with a deft snatch, turned him back even more abruptly.

"None o' that, buddy—none o' that!" said Mr. Grayson with a firm smile. "Where's your hats and coats?"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



The Star Part

by
Raymond Lester

OLD man Crick surveyed his visitor up and down critically. He mumbled between his toothless gums and screwed up his wrinkled, wicked old face with a grimace of satisfaction.

"Considerin' as you ain't never done a honest day's work in your life, you've managed a slick job all right. In them duds, Bert, you sure do look near nuff to the real thing to fool the watchman. Got your blinker and pen?"

"Sure."

Bert Mackintosh showed the fountain pen clipped in his vest pocket and displayed the transparent, green shade that clerks and bookkeepers are accustomed to wear, vizorlike, over their eyes. He grinned delightedly.

"Ain't missed a dee-tail," he bragged. "I've got a line on the watchman's route. The time he starts on his rounds, and the time he finishes to a dot. Ain't missed a thing. Tell you what, Crick, if you've got all your part fixed up, as you said you would, we're on velvet. There's bound to be a tidy pile of kale in the safe to-night. I *know*, because I hung about until past four o'clock, and there weren't no messenger went to the bank. The cash is there all right, just waiting for me to walk in and pick it up. Fifty-fifty, there'll be more'n enough for both of us. You'll be able to shut up shop and take a vacation.

Gosh, it beats me how you can stick around this dump year after year and not get sick. Fair gives me the creeps."

Bert Mackintosh, crook of parts and petty rogue, quick-witted but not particularly clever, sniffed and glanced about the cellar that was used by Crick as a store-room for junk and a safe meeting-place for his associates.

Crick's main source of profit was obtained by his position as backer to second-story men and the smaller fry among crooks. The junk business was a blind; but it was very effective and covered his evil trading as effectually as the collection of rags and lengths of useless rope served to mask the door concealed in the side wall of his cellar.

"Maybe it do give you the creeps, as you call it," snapped the old man, "but I notice that you and a lot o' other guys is mighty glad to come here when you're short of the ready or hung up for help. Most of you fellers has to fall back on the rough stuff and use a gun or a knife. It takes me to frame up a scheme that won't land you in the chair if something goes wrong. *You* know what I mean, eh?"

Crick shot a sidelong glance at the young crook's blanched face, and he laughed malevolently.

"Bah! You nor nobody else ain't got

nothing on me," snarled Bert. "Get down to business. Do I pull off that mail-order-house job to-night, or don't I? Have you done your bit?"

Old man Crick bobbed his head.

"Sure," he chuckled. "Listen to this:"

He spoke rapidly for some moments, and a look of dismay gradually spread over Mackintosh's thin face. His narrowed eyes glittered. His lips curled with contempt.

"And you reckon," he burst out when his backer had finished—"you reckon a kid can pull off a deal like that without giving herself and me away? It listens well, but—"

"Take it or leave it," snapped the old man. "I know what I'm talking about, and I know what the kid can do. I had her down here t'other night, and she did the whole thing as natcheral as life. She's a reg'lar Sairy-Bernhard. I'll bet she'll play her part better 'n you. And I've gotta string on her that she won't break."

"Aw, you're crazy!" cried Mackintosh.

"So? Then go ahead on your own," retorted Crick. "Here I take the trouble to work out a nice, easy frame-up, no gun needed, no violence, no risk, and you turn up your fool nose. I should think," he concluded as he picked up a piece of paper and started writing, "that you've had enough trouble over that last little affair. Gun play's a risky game."

Mackintosh thrust his face close to that of the old man.

"Can that," he grated with bared gums. "If I did croak the guy that butted in at the wrong moment, I don't have to stand none of that talk from you. I know enough to put you away for keeps, so we's quits on that score. Now, since you're so darned set on your pet idea, where's the kid? Got 'er handy? There's no time to spare if I'm to pull off the job to-night."

"She'll be right here soon now. She—" The old junk dealer broke off and pointed a skinny forefinger.

Mackintosh swung on his heel and scowled at the secret door. It opened but a few inches, and Bert spat disgustedly as he looked down at the poorly dressed girl who edged through the aperture.

"Look who's here," he muttered. "And that's going to help me do a job?"

II.

THE ragged child stood facing the two men. There was a hint of defiance in her lifted chin, a watchful eagerness in her lash-veiled eyes, a droop to her tremulous mouth, that denoted that although she was simulating bravery she was controlling and trying hard to conceal her nervousness.

Bert Mackintosh surveyed the bedraggled little figure through narrowed eyelids, and the girl's feet shifted uneasily as his appraising glance rested on her muddy, clumsy shoes.

"Say, Crick," he drawled, "whatter you call this? A rag, an' a bone, an' a hank of hair. What is it, anyway? What's its name?"

The old man grunted irritably as he peered up from the scrap of paper. "Shut your mouth," he commenced; "leave the kid alone. She—"

"I don't care if he does know my name," shrilled the girl. "Tell him to keep his eyes off o' me. Who is *he*, anyway? A monkey-faced crook, that's what he is."

These remarks were concluded by a look of flashing scorn from the little creature, then, after indicating her supreme contempt for Bert by sticking out her tongue at him, she added:

"M' name's Stella. What you got to say about that?"

"Ha—ha—ha—yah!" The crook threw back his head and let out a burst of coarse laughter. "Stella! That dirty, ugly little mutt with a monniker like that! Gosh, that beats the band! She—"

"Stop it, stop it, you fool!" hissed Crick angrily. "Leave her alone, and mind your own business. Here, Stella—you come back. This guy thinks he's funny. He don't mean nothing. Come on. You know what I promised you? Now's your chance, but don't let nothing put you off."

Stella stopped in her flight for the street and, turning as she reached the secret side

door, looked back over her left shoulder. She propped her small, red fists on her thin hips and struck an attitude intending to carry a withering contempt. It was laughable; but it was also tragically pathetic.

Mackintosh sniggered with caddish joy of baiting the child.

"Gosh blame it!" he chuckled. "She kids herself she's cut out for a movie dame."

Again the old junk dealer came to the rescue and prevented the girl from acting on the spur of the insult. His knobbly jointed, scrawny fingers grabbed her arm, and he led her, protesting vigorously, to the table.

He patted her shoulder as he pushed her into a chair.

"Don't you mind him," he muttered with revolting, oily persuasiveness in his voice and manner. "Be a wise kid, and don't let him get your goat. I'll fix him."

With this comforting threat, Crick turned and spat an oath-adorned sentence at Bert.

"Get out," he snarled, "or else cut out that blamed ha-ha business. You're likely to queer the game with your derved fooling."

Keeping a sidelong eye on the girl, the old man sidled nearer to Mackintosh. Between a string of curses and vituperation he managed to whisper:

"Quit ragging her. Wait till the job's done."

Mackintosh sneered maliciously; but he absorbed his backer's counsel, and, lighting a pungent, imported cigarette, strolled swaggeringly toward a rusty stove that burned sulkily at the back of the damp cellar.

He realized from Crick's manner that he had gone too far and endangered their mutual interest by tantalizing the girl. How she could serve them he did not fully know; and although his mean, petty spite was no less, he turned and, catching the resentful look in the girl's dark, smoldering eyes, smiled ingratiatingly.

"S all right, kiddo!" he exclaimed. "I don't mean nothing. Ferget it."

Stella frowned and tossed her head at

this; but she listened quietly and intently to the mutterings of the old man.

From time to time she nodded with quick comprehension, and when he handed her some coins screwed up in the scrap of paper that he had written on, there was no doubt that Stella's intelligence was far greater than her worldly possessions.

"Think you can pull it off?" inquired Crick anxiously as Stella dragged about her shoulders the dirty wisp of scarlet cloth that she wore as a cape.

"Betcha life. It's pie," was her laconic reply, and without deigning to glance at Mackintosh she ran to the door and pushed the hidden spring. As the door swung to, her face appeared again in the narrowing opening. Her eyes were eager, almost pleading. "You'll keep your promise? Sure?" she whispered mysteriously.

"Sure. Sure, honey. You're as good as—" commenced Crick, with a leering grin.

"Sh!"

Stella held up her hand and wiggled a finger in imperative sign of silence and secrecy.

"I gotcher!" she cried. "I believe you, only don't tell old monkey-face there."

III.

JOE MORGAN, watchman of the mail-order house that had been under the espionage of Mackintosh, paused as he raised his hand to punch the time-clock in the entrance hall of the huge building under his care. He stood listening; but he could hear nothing but the swish of the rain in the avenue.

"That's funny," he muttered. "I could have sworn that I heard the sound of a child crying. Couldn't have—yes, there it is again."

In two strides the watchman reached the heavy door. He opened it and leaned out. Crouched over an iron grating that ventilated the basement was a girl. Her shoulders were draped with a rain-soaked, red cape. She was crying as if her heart would break.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Morgan. —

The girl lifted her head. Her dark eyes, brimming with tears, were piteous.

"I've lost—I've dropped my money. It's down there. Look." She pointed to a screw of paper showing faintly in the gloom below.

"There's seventy-five cents there," she sobbed. "My mother 'll beat me, and I can't get home. I—" In a wild paroxysm of hysterical grief the girl clutched the watchman's arm.

"Sh!" he soothed. "Don't carry on so. I'll get it for you. Let go my arm."

The child clung the closer, and, babbling inarticulate words of gratitude, allowed herself to be dragged through the doorway. She collapsed in a heap on the floor.

For a second the watchman hesitated; then he closed the door.

"You wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

Down in the basement a little incident occurred that annoyed Joe Morgan and ruffled his temper. Just as his hand touched the wad of paper, a burning cigarette stub fell through the grating.

"Some careless blighter," he muttered angrily as he ground the glowing end beneath his heel. "That's how places get set on fire."

Then he turned the little packet of money over in his hand. He looked at it in the light of his pocket torch. Penciled on the paper in straggling characters was a list of articles. Joe Morgan distinguished the words: dill pickles, bread, cheese. The rest was a blurred smudge.

All the same, Crick had prepared for possible surprises, and, quite convinced that the child was nothing but an unfortunate little morsel of humanity, the watchman ascended to the entrance hall.

The girl received her money with snatching haste that Joe Morgan thought was due to her fear of a beating for being gone so long over her errand, and when he opened the door and she stood shivering on the steps his soft heart was touched by her thinness and her air of misery. He put his hand into his pocket, brought forth a silver coin.

"Here!" he exclaimed gruffly as he

shoved a quarter into the girl's hand. "Take this and get yourself something to eat."

Then, before she could utter a word of thanks, he slammed the door, punched the time-clock, and stumped off on his rounds. On the landing of the first floor he came to a sudden halt.

During the five years since he had first patrolled that building nothing out of the ordinary had interrupted the commonplace routine of his duties. Now he stared up at the light shining through the transom of the treasurer's office.

"Some fool left the switch on," he thought, and flung open the door.

He stood dumfounded.

Seated at a high desk was a youngish-looking man, poring over an account book. He was in his shirt sleeves, and wore a green shade over his eyes. He seemed to be too busily absorbed in his work to look up or pay any attention to the watchman.

"What the—" commenced Morgan, and then shouted: "Who are you? What are you doing here? How did you get here?"

The stranger carefully laid down his fountain pen and slowly turned. His shadowed eyes surveyed the stocky figure of the watchman with leisurely contemplation.

"Say," shouted Morgan, "I got to know—"

"All in good time," said the young man with careful precision of accent. "You asked me three questions. Well, I'll answer them. My name's Mackenzie; I'm an accountant; I'm checking the books; and I walked in here."

"How did you get in?"

"Get in? Why, the usual way, of course. I arrived just before you came on duty; and, since you're so all-fired anxious, I'll tell you this much." The young man slipped off his high stool and, coming nearer the watchman, lowered his voice. "The president's suspicious," he explained. "He thinks there is a—a—crook at work, some funny business going on, and, so as not to arouse any alarm and scare off the thief, he instructed me to come here and

after office hours to look things over. Satisfied? If not, call up the president, and ask him if Mackenzie's all right. There's the telephone. His number's 44567 Byron."

Having concluded his long speech, the young man lighted a cigarette and turned back to the desk.

For a fractional space of time Joe Morgan stood frowning perplexedly and irresolute. Then, murmuring "Guess it's all right," he withdrew. He walked to the end of the landing, sniffing the heavy odor of Turkish tobacco from his nostrils. Then, contrary to his usual custom, instead of going up, he went down—down by a back staircase, until he stood again beneath the grating where but a few minutes previous he had recovered the money dropped by the girl in the red cape.

For an ordinary watchman his actions were peculiar. He picked up the cigarette stub that he had ground beneath his heel, and examined it minutely. The mark it bore, stamped in violet and gold, proved it to be an unusual brand. Joe Morgan very thoughtfully returned to the first floor and once more entered the treasurer's office.

This time the young man was not so busy. He was standing midway between the desk and the safe. Exactly where he had been, or what he had been doing before the watchman entered, the latter could not surmise.

"Sorry to bother you," said Morgan, "but the smell of your cigarette kind o' gives me a longing for a smoke. Got one to spare? I don't cotton to them as a rule, but—"

"Help yourself. Take a couple," professed the other.

Joe Morgan contented himself with one. It was sufficient.

The trade-mark was stamped in violet and gold, and of the same design as the one he had found in the basement. This was by no means conclusive evidence that Mackenzie was not all that he said he was; but it helped.

The watchman turned to go; but he stopped to strike a match before he left the office, and his hand passed rapidly over the

coat hanging by the door. The automatic he found in the side pocket *also* helped. He closed the door after him and silently turned the key. Then, quite leisurely, for he knew the strength of the oak door and the bars on the windows, he went down to the hallway and found a series of partly dried footmarks that were not his own or the girl's.

The conclusion was obvious: Mr. Mackenzie had entered the building *after* closing time. Only one person could have let him in—the girl in the red cape; the weeping child.

"So, they thought to fool an old stager like me," murmured Morgan. "This deserves a little slow-degree suspense."

He made no sound as he returned to the first floor, but sat on the top of the stairs waiting, watching, and listening. After a long silence there came sounds of steady pressure and heavy breathing behind the locked door. Then silence.

"Scared stiff," thought Morgan, and sat smiling and thinking of the days before he had retired and become a watchman. "It's as good as old times," he reflected; "but that kid certainly did put one over on me. Anyway, I'm on the safe side now, even if he ain't a crook."

A moment later a look of anxiety shone in Joe Morgan's eyes. The light in the treasurer's office had gone out. No sound came from the darkened room. The action savored of some unexpected move. Waiting and watching there on the silent landing, Joe Morgan became a prey to doubt regarding the wisdom of his actions. "I ought to have arrested him right away," he growled angrily. "I meant to keep him there until morning, but the Lord knows what tricks he may get up to now."

IV.

HER frail little body quivering with excitement, and her quick mind a chaos of conflicting emotions, Stella darted off from the scene of her "play-acting" and deception of the watchman.

Despite her clumsy shoes, the rain, and the mud, she moved nimbly; and less than three minutes after Joe Morgan had closed

the door of the mail-order house she was flitting along the Bowery.

Having eaten little that day, she was hungry enough to have obeyed the watchman's order; but she gave no heed to the dainties displayed in delicatessen windows or the appetizing odors that came temptingly from cheap restaurants and cafés. Stella was following a greater lure, and was all impatience and feverish eagerness to satisfy her longing. She had done all that old man Crick had told her. His instructions had been carried out to the letter. She had earned her reward. To-morrow she would claim his promise, and her cherished dream and ambition would be fulfilled.

To-night she would celebrate on one-fifth of the watchman's gift. She hugged herself with delight, and, heedless of the fact that she was drenched to the skin, she splashed across the rain-thrashed streets. Unheeding she dodged behind a trolley-car, avoided collision with a speeding taxi by a bare six inches and, reaching the sidewalk, took up a position not too near and not too far from the brilliantly illuminated lobby plastered with highly colored and dramatic posters.

The law declares that children shall not enter a motion-picture house unaccompanied by an adult. The law also decrees that a child shall be properly nurtured and educated; but Stella was an adept in evading school inspectors, as she was friendless, and was prepared to take a short cut toward circumventing an obstacle.

Eagerly she scrutinized the faces of the passers-by.

Women she scarcely glanced at. Men she examined and weighed more carefully, murmuring to herself, as one by one she let them pass: "He's no good. This one's mean. He looks like a beast. That one—This one—no, he's in a hurry; he ain't going in. This one looks like a cop in glad rags, *he's* no good. He'd pinch me." So it went on until the girl spied in the distance a figure coming along at a rolling gait. "A sailor! Gobs is good-natured." Stella jumped for her quarry with a little squeal of delight.

"Please—" she commenced, and thrust the quarter at the spot where the sailor's vest would have terminated if he had been an ordinary citizen. The man did not need the jerk of Stella's head in the direction of the blazing lobby or the proffered coin to enable him to read the riddle. He was in a hurry; but he proved himself a soft-hearted gentleman and—liberal. Neither did he consider the illegal side of his act of kindness.

Such is the way of sailor boys, and having deposited Stella in a seat in the center aisle of the stuffy haven of her desires, he pressed a dime into her damp hand, growled a warning to her to "Go home quick after the show to yer ma," and went on his way.

Stella, her eyes glued to the magic screen, was barely conscious that her knightly benefactor had departed. She was there for business and pleasure combined. With all the fervor of her being, she lived the scenes she saw. She throbbed to the perils of the beautiful, tortured heroine captured by the hirelings of the crafty rogue. She gloried in the triumph of right over might, and all but clapped her hands with joy when everything came out as it should at the end of the first film.

Stella was a puzzling little paradox. In the abstract, she was moral and scrupulously exact regarding the ethics of right and wrong *on the screen*. In real life she was—only ten.

The second series of pictures, entitled "Checkmate," did not hold her interest at all. In the first place, she did not understand the meaning of the title; and, secondly, she could not for the life of her imagine how anything exciting could happen in an office.

Her face grew listless as she watched the slow actions of sedate business men, and then her thoughts drifted to pleasanter subjects of speculation. She dwelt long on the alluring prospects of the morrow, when the old junk dealer would give her her reward.

Then, in natural sequence, she thought of Mackintosh, and her fine, straight brows came together in a sudden frown as the

evil, sneering face of the crook came before her half-closed eyes.

"Beast! Pig!" she muttered, and clenched her hands. The coins cut into her palms, and she loosened her warm, clammy grip and realized that she had not only a quarter, but a dime—thirty-five cents; the quarter she had received from the watchman and a dime from the sailor.

"Gee! I guess I'll have a big blowout after the show's over." Between visions of what she would have to eat, and vague wonder at her good fortune, Stella watched the picture with discontented gaze. It lacked go, punch. There was no grip to it until—

A close-up flashed on the screen. An evil, sneering face, thin-lipped, cruel-eyed, glared menacingly over the shadowy figures in the audience. Gradually the face dissolved, the eyes grew larger, huge, gigantic. Then they fixed and, staring straight ahead, bored right into the fascinated eyes of Stella.

Her imagination seized upon their resemblance to Bert Mackintosh's, and a shiver of sudden uneasiness chilled her. She wriggled uncomfortably and heaved a deep sigh of relief when those eyes were blotted out and the film resumed its progress. But the fear remained, and a feeling of loneliness stole over her. The memory of Crick's crafty, toothless, leering and wrinkled face came to her, and by way of relief and the comfort provided by contrast she tried to picture the watchman's face as he had bent over her and given her the quarter.

He had looked rather grumpy; but he had smiled "kind o' good," she decided. As for Mackintosh—Stella's snatchy dreaming suddenly crystallized.

The man with the evil eyes was again on the screen. He was bent double and creeping, creeping toward another who had his back turned and was apparently unaware of any danger. There was a threat, a malign intent expressed in each slow, stealthy movement of that creeping figure. A strained look came into Stella's distended eyes. Her mind became a whirling maze of thoughts, of half-seized dread, and with

awful suddenness a vision of crime blazed upon her.

Bert Mackintosh had already killed one man, and—she had opened the door for him to commit a robbery. Was that all? She had betrayed, gone back on the kind-faced man who had given her the quarter. Mackintosh would be creeping behind him and—

The girl's teeth chattered with fright. She sat frozen rigid to her seat with overwhelming terror. Then, as the creeping man in the picture delivered his blow she gave a sobbing shriek of panic, flung out her hands, and without heeding the coins that tinkled on the bare boards she scrambled and tore her way to the exit. Her great ambition was forgotten, swamped in the horror that gripped her.

Hands outstretched in the darkness groped, tried to grasp her; but she eluded them all with the sudden rush of her flight. Up-town she scuttled, and before she turned across Union Square she ran into a policeman.

Her tale, wildly disconnected and told with sobbing, panting breaths, resulted in the officer's mildly amazed curiosity changing to swift action. They arrived at the door that had been so fateful to Stella's continued peace of mind, and while he held her prisoner the policeman hammered at the hardwood panels.

After a long wait—a period of torture to the weeping girl—the door opened, and Joe Morgan looked placid inquiry at the officer.

The instant she saw the watchman Stella strove to squirm free.

"No, you don't," grunted the policeman. "What's the meaning of that yarn you gave me? Murder, robbery, Heaven knows what. You for the penitentiary, young lady. What's the game?"

The man's hand shook the girl gently; but all the reply that he got was a series of spasmodic sobs and incoherent requests to "let go." He turned a puzzled gaze upon the watchman.

The latter's face was masklike in its lack of expression; but the keen eyes beneath their bushy brows had held a curious look of intentness, and a half-sad, half-

humorous understanding during the little scene.

"Nothing wrong, eh, Joe?" inquired the policeman perfunctorily.

"Not what you might call very urgent," replied Morgan, "but I guess that you may as well step in for a moment; I want to talk to that kid. She's a friend of mine. I kind o' think she got out of her depth—sort o' mixed up and confused."

"What the—" commenced the policeman, then at a sign from Morgan he stopped abruptly and pushed Stella forward.

In the dimly lighted entrance hall Morgan whispered a few words to the officer, and, taking the girl by the hand, led her into one of the offices, switched on the light, and quickly closed the door. Stella, her wobegone features streaked with irregular rivulets where the tears had washed her face clean, stared up at Morgan's grave eyes. She met his gaze bravely; but her lips trembled and she nervously twisted and untwisted her fingers.

V.

"You dropped that money down the grating on purpose," accused Morgan. "Tell the truth now, and be mighty quick about it, or—" He paused significantly and added: "Well, you heard what the officer said about the penitentiary?"

The girl's head drooped in misery.

"It was a plant—a put-up job," stated Morgan.

Stella nodded.

"Who put you up to it?"

"Old man Crick."

"Where does he live?"

Twice was this question repeated, and then Stella falteringly gave the address of the junk dealer.

Following an assurance that Crick would be rendered powerless to "get her," the girl answered a host of questions; but she jibbed and hung her head when the watchman pressed her for her name, the whereabouts of her parents, and her reason for carrying out Crick's orders. Finally she confessed to having run away from a home, and declared her name was

Stella. She immediately capped this last with a denial and a rush of words.

"No—it ain't S-Stella. It's Maggie. I got t'other name off o' a picture I seen of a movie actress. And I ain't got no father nor mother. I'm an orphan, an' old man Crick promised that if I'd drop that money down the grating an' played so's you'd go an' get it, so's I could open the door for Mackintosh, that he'd take me to-morrer to a motion-picture place where they make the plays, an' I could learn to be a big actress an'—"

The rest was lost in a burst of weeping.

Joe Morgan surveyed the little waif with pity straining at his heart.

"Why did you come back, then?" he asked gruffly.

"'Cos I got scared and I—I thought maybe he'd creep up behind you an' hit you over the head an'—"

Then, in support of her belief, Stella added a startling bit of information. "I knew he would, 'cos I heard him say he'd croaked *one* man."

There was a set grimness to Joe Morgan's jaw when he returned to the hall. He knew now that his prisoner was not only an artful cracksman, but a murderer. It was characteristic of the man that before he left Stella alone in the office he accepted her promise not to move until he returned, and sternly insisted that she do her best to despatch the contents of his supper pail.

Joe Morgan's pity tended to take a practical turn, and he wasted no time in flaying the little culprit with needless words of reproach. Besides, he did not forget that, once the girl had realized what she had done, she had cast all thought of herself to the winds and returned to save him from danger.

His explanations to the officer were terse.

"Mind you, though," he finished, "the kid's out of it. Come on up-stairs. I reckon you won't have no trouble, although you've got a murderer to nab." Arrived on the first floor, the watchman pointed to a closed door. "In there," he said.

The policeman reached for his gun, and

Morgan smiled and shook his head. "No need for that," he stated. "You're big enough to handle him. I know he ain't heeled because directly I tumbled to the cigarette clue I frisked the gun out of his coat pocket and looked him over. All the pep's gone out of him by this time. He tried to 'draw' me by shutting off the light, but I sat tight. It is a cinch now."

It was. All the pluck had oozed out of Mackintosh, and he was marched away, driveling and quaking with the knowledge of what awaited him.

Mackintosh could fell his victim from behind, or bully a helpless child; but he was not man enough to take his medicine without whimpering. Although he babbled and dragged the villainous old junk dealer into the same net that had brought his career to a short, sharp finish, ways and

means were found of preventing Stella's inclusion in the prosecution and punishment of the pair.

Joe Morgan, watchman and retired police detective, had rendered valuable services, and the fact that he adopted and assumed the responsibility of bringing up Stella was no one's business but his own.

The weeding out of the evil influences that had left their scars on the little waif was not an easy task, but there proved gold beneath her uncouth manners and her warped nature responded to the loving kindness of the watchman and his wife. Three months following her entry to her new home Stella confided a secret to Joe Morgan.

"I'm not going to be a movie actress," she declared. "It's not exciting enough, I'm going to be a dee-tective."



THE ROAD THAT MEMORY TAKES

I KNOW they wonder why I walk this way;
 The close-cropped grass, the everlastings gray,
 The sheep that startled from their feeding look,
 Willows that darkly line the half-dried brook—
 They see but these; and, seeing, wonder why
 Such things have power to lure my feet; but I
 See o'er these dull-hued scenes a vision brood.
 Here once you walked with me down to the wood
 That lies beyond the pasture; 'twas your hand
 Let down the bars and showed to me love's land.

Oh, land of beauty, where rose-hued, gold-laced,
 Seemed my dull gown by magic fingers wrought;
 I saw the change as we the green bank sought,
 There, side by side, youth prodigal to waste.
 Why should the night's near shadow make such haste
 To cross our paths? Oh, day of sacredness!
 Now, as adown these fields my way I press,
 Unseen of others still you walk by me,
 Though far and strange the lands that your eyes see,
 Whence none comes back to say if skies be blue,
 Or if the hands be filled with rose or rue!

Cora A. Matson Dolson.

The Buster

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Brass Elephant," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COLD CREAM JAR.

IT was emphatically no part of Coryell's scheme of things to take his party anywhere within easy riding distance of the brisk settlement of Buck Snort. Lying as it did close to the Slash K range the neighborhood was not quite the proper sphere for women under his protection. This, although the one he had given Light Laurie was true enough, was his primary reason for wishing to avoid the place. Regarding a trip to the town, he had told Miss Rowland he would "see" about it. An eminently safe and sane remark to make to most people. But Miss Rowland was Miss Rowland.

In the morning Coryell led his convoy across the creek into an open valley that ran eastward. Miss Rowland said nothing till noon. Then she demanded that Coryell show her the precise direction in which lay Buck Snort. He showed her.

"Then why are we going this way?" she asked, staring at him fixedly.

"Better travelin'," he evaded.

"But this valley looks as if it leads more and more to the south of east. Buck Snort lies to the northwest. How do you expect to reach Buck Snort by riding south?"

"I don't expect to," he told her bluntly.

"But you told me you'd take me there."

"No ma'am, I did not. I never said nothin' like that. What I said was I'd see about takin' you there. I've decided not to take you there or go near the place."

"Why?"

"Well, the country ain't none of the best

for scenery an' the like o' that. Where we're goin' is better, take my word."

"I don't want to take your word. I want to go where you said you'd take me. I want to go to Buck Snort."

"Buck Snort ain't a fit place for a lady. She's a awful tough town. Shucks, you don't wanna go there. You only think so."

"Think! Think!" She fell upon his last unfortunate remark tooth and claw. "I rather imagine I know where I want to go. I can do my own thinking. There isn't any one in this world can do it for me. We're going to Buck Snort."

At this juncture Smoky and Light Laurie discovered that they had imperative business among the pack horses. Coryell looked appealingly at Mrs. Rowland. He trusted that she would have the mental vision to discern the complete inadvisability of proceeding to Buck Snort. But in some respects Mrs. Rowland's makeup left much to be desired. Besides, she was learning day by day that the ways of a reformer are hard—especially when the reformer is a girl who just *will* have her own way. Mrs. Rowland was beginning to doubt her wisdom in taking on the problem. She had believed that she and Coryell could swing it, but she could not say that either of them had made much progress.

The headstrong Charlotte continued to pursue the uneven tenor of her way with little or no regard for the rights of others. The previous night she had kept Mrs. Rowland awake till all hours with her eternal chatter, and then had dragged her out of bed at dawn to see the sunrise. Oh, Mrs. Rowland was beginning to be fed up with

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 18.

her charming niece. For all that, she was grimly resolved to go through with the summer. But if the path could be made easier in any way, for Heaven's sake let it be made so! If going to Buck Snort would please Charlotte, to Buck Snort they would go. It would at least give Charlotte something to think about besides deviling her aunt.

Mrs. Rowland answered Coryell's look of appeal with her best smile.

"Why not go to Buck Snort?" she queried. "We have the whole summer before us. It won't take more than a week at the outside."

"But—" Coryell hesitated. He could not tell them why he did not wish to go to Buck Snort. They would surely misconstrue the truth. He did not know what to say.

"Why don't you want to go to Buck Snort?" demanded Miss Rowland. "What is there in the place that you're averse to seeing—or facing?"

"Nothin'."

"Then we'll go there without any further argument."

"I really don't see why we shouldn't," said Mrs. Rowland.

"All right," Coryell assented stiffly, and went away to roll a cigarette with Smoky and Light Laurie.

"I see we're a-goin' to Buck Snort," said Light to Smoky after one look at Coryell's face.

"Shore are," corroborated Coryell disgustedly.

"Good town," was the half-breed's comment. "I lose feefty-two dollar un my pony dere one tam. No have de luck dat day. Mebbeso I geet eet back dees trip."

There was no intercourse between Miss Rowland and Coryell that day or the next. He kept as far away from her as possible, and she did not seek him out. But the third day she dropped back to where he rode alone at the tail of the train.

"Well, crosspatch," was her sufficiently impudent greeting, "don't you think you've nursed your bad temper long enough?"

He regarded her woodenly. "What was that you said?" he drawled.

"Never mind," she told him. "But

cheer up, for Heaven's sake! Cherries will soon be ripe, you know. Is my riding improving, do you think?"

"Not a whole lot," he said deliberately. "You slip an' slide round too much for the good of the hoss's back. Slouchin' like a meal-sack won't never make you a good rider, not in this world."

She stared at him with sparkling eyes. "Do you know," she said presently, "I think that you are one of the very rudest men I've ever met."

"Don't take it so to heart," he advised her, unruffled. "Yo're young yet. Maybe some day you'll meet a ruder. Never mind yore luck, as the feller says."

"If I ever do meet a ruder I'll preserve him in alcohol—as a curiosity."

"Yo're improvin'. A while ago you wouldn't 'a' said that—just thataway. Yessir, yo're lookin' up an' takin' notice o' the scenery as it flits by."

"Thank you," said she between her teeth. "You interest me strangely. Pray go on."

"Whuffor? Ain't I said enough?"

"Almost."

"Yeah, I thought so."

"I don't know why I—" she stammered disjointedly. "You make me so mad I—"

"You could hit me," he supplied calmly.

"Fly at it. They's yore quirt a-hangin' on yore horn. Nemmind my feelin's or anythin' else. Take the bridle off yore temper and let her rip."

Miss Rowland took him at his word. With fingers that shook under the stress of the anger that possessed her she unwound the double-looped thong, gripped the handle of the quirt and threw up her arm to take a free swing at her tormentor. Naturally, at the first swish of the forked lash her horse sprang sidewise and forward. The lady narrowly missed being unseated and was forced to drop her quirt and snatch madly at the saddlehorn to save herself. Swaying back on the curb she nipped the embryo runaway at the third jump and brought her horse up all standing.

She looked before her apprehensively, but no one with the train, which had drawn a little ahead, had observed the occurrence. She glanced back at Coryell. He was

stooping from the saddle to scoop up her quirt from where it had fallen. He straightened and joined her, taking care however not to approach too closely.

"Never let yore angry passions rise," he advised her gravely. "Lil birds in their nests should agree. But yo're improvin', I'll tell anybody that. You bet you are," he continued warmly. "You held in a lot longer than I expected. Don't it make yuh feel like a fool to lose yore temper out here in these hills? Look at 'em yonder across the valley. Four miles away they are an' they don't look one. Big an' silent an' solemn as a graveyard at a funeral. They been there a million years, an' they'll be there longer after we're dead an' dust. I wonder what them hills think o' the men they see a comin' an' goin' like ants all so mighty important an' just too busy with their own lil tin-horn deals that don't matter three whoops in a hot stove when all's done.

"Whadda they think of you for instance—gettin' het an' pernickety? Yes you are, too. You know you are. Yo're so mad you could chaw nails. An' it's all so useless. Yeah, the outfit has passed over the rise, so yuh needn't bother to look. They can't see anythin' you do."

Miss Rowland's half-turned head snapped round with a jerk. She wheeled her mount, drove home her heels and rode straight at Coryell. Ranger, well-trained animal that he was, neatly sidestepped the rush of the other horse.

"You see how it is," continued the cool, exasperating voice. "You can't even ride straight. Yo're seein' red a-plenty, an' yo're a-grittin' yore teeth together. An' the worst of it is, you know better—There! Missed me again, though Lord knows what you think you'll do by runnin' into me I dunno. Ranger outweighs yore pony a hundred pounds. Speakin' of ponies, you kind of expect a pony to act mean sometimes. They got reason. Been broke wrong, or treated bad, somethin' like that. But you never was treated bad in yore life, an' yo're actin' scandalous. Take a look at yoreself—a grown woman. Yeah—another miss—as usual. Try shuttin' yore eyes once. Stops on his front feet, don't he?

Sort of jounces yuh up on top of the horn, don't it? Yup, grippin' with yore knees don't help a whole lot when a hoss stops on his front feet. Better keep yore mouth closed or yuh'll bite yuh tongue. *That* would worry yuh, I expect."

Miss Rowland was so consumed with rage that she hardly realized what she was doing. To stop that mocking voice, to strike and strike hard the voice's owner was her sole desire. Necessity is the mother of invention, and in Miss Rowland's off cantina was a half-pound jar of cold cream. Now, a jar of cold cream employed as a missile is no mean projectile, especially when the jar is nearly full. Miss Rowland, casting vainly about for a weapon, suddenly remembered the jar of cold cream. She clawed open the flap of the cantina, whipped out the jar, and flung it with all her might into Coryell's face. She was so close to him, and her action was so unexpected, that he had no time to dodge. The heavy jar struck him smash in the center of the forehead. Whirling constellations blazed in his eyes, he swayed drunkenly in the saddle, grabbed at the horn, missed it and pitched over it head first. But he was unconscious before he hit the ground.

When he came to, his head, sketchily bandaged, was in Mrs. Rowland's lap and Smoky Nivette was impartially drenching both him and Mrs. Rowland with a hatful of water. A voice, it seemed to be a distant voice, was wailing, "I hit him with the cold cream! I'll never forgive myself! I hit him with the cold cream!"

Dizzily he recognized the voice of Miss Rowland. His head ached. It felt larger than a barrel. Dimly he recalled why it ached and felt larger than a barrel.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Again the voice of Miss Rowland.

"Did you say you hit him with the cold cream?" Thus incredulously Mrs. Rowland.

"I did! I did! I got mad and—". The lady broke down and wept.

"But I don't understand," persisted Mrs. Rowland. "The cold cream? What on earth—" She paused in complete bewilderment.

Coryell's dazed wits came out of the mist

with a rush. He sat up and looked, grinning widely, at the members of the little group of which he was the center.

"That hoss shore jerked me down, didn't he?" he remarked cheerfully. "Think o' me lettin' Ranger put it all over me that-away."

"Why—I hit you!" cried Miss Rowland, lowering her hands and revealing a surprised and tear-stained face.

The expression of intense astonishment on Coryell's face would have done credit to an experienced actor. "You hit me!" said he. "You hit *me*! No, I think not. I fell off o' Ranger an' landed on my head. I guess I oughta know. Shucks, don't you remember how I was talkin' to yuh, an' not payin' attention to my hoss—"

"Why," interrupted Mrs. Rowland, diving an arm into the bunchgrass, "here's the cold cream jar! And—and there's blood on it!"

"There oughta be," Coryell assured her shamelessly. "That's what I landed on. Yuh see it was thisaway: I was a-talkin' to Miss Rowland like I said, an' one o' my fingers was a lil sore like—I must 'a' strained it yesterday—an' I was wonderin' if rubbin' on a lil o' Miss Rowland's cold cream mightn't limber it up sort of. So I borrowed the jar, an' I had it in my hand when Ranger jerked me down, an' my head hit it an' the ground plumb center an' simultaneous. Now wasn't that the how of it, Miss Rowland?"

"No, it wasn't," denied Miss Rowland stoutly if jerkily. "You know perfectly well I threw the jar at you, and—"

"Shucks, yo're seein' things. No offense meant at all, but yuh are. I'm afraid the sun's been too much for yuh. She is a lil hot to-day. Mis' Rowland, ma'am, if I was to wet a handkerchief an' tie it round Miss Rowland's head I'll bet it would be good for her. Sunstroke begins first this-away. I've noticed it time an' again. Folks see things that ain't there, an' they talk funny an' all, just like yore niece is a-doin' now. You wet that handkerchief good an' tie it round her head."

But Miss Rowland refused such ministration, and reiterated her former statement to the huge disgust of Coryell.

"C'mon, folks," said he, "we're losin' time. I'm feelin' fine now. Lil tap on the head like this ain't nothin'. Let's get a-goin'. I'll bet that Eli hoss has lost himself again."

But Eli, for once in his sinful life, had not lost himself. He was discovered busily cropping grass in the neighborhood of the blue mare.

The pack train got under way. Coryell resumed his place at the tail of the column. Miss Rowland started off with her aunt and Smoky ahead of the blue mare, but within the hour she pulled her mount to one side and waited for Coryell to come up. When he was abreast she fell in at his side with an uncertain little smile.

"I don't know what to say," she said shakily.

"Then don't say it," he said with a grin that held nothing back.

"I—I've got to! I was a beast! I don't see how I could have done it! I—I—Oh, why did you lie for me?"

He stared in surprise. "Lie for yuh!" he exclaimed. "Not me. I dunno what yo're talkin' about."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to deny it in front of other people, but why with—"

"Shucks, forget it. I have. It didn't happen. Don't you bother yore head thinkin' about it."

She was twisting her hands together till the knuckles showed white. Her troubled dark eyes hung on his straight gaze. "I can't tell you how ashamed I am! I—Oh, your poor head! I might have killed you."

"No such luck. My skull's too thick. You couldn't make no impression on my head with a axe. It don't hurt a bit."

"It must. Oh, it must! I'm—I'm—I don't know what I am to do a thing like that."

"You didn't know what you was doin', thassall," he told her seriously. "It was more my fault than it was yores. I shouldn't 'a' gone an' made yuh so mad. I was foolin', an' I hadn't no business doin' it."

"You're an awfully decent sort," she told him, "Not many men would have acted toward me as you've done. I hope we can be friends again."

He looked at her outstretched hand, at her face, at her hand again, then gave her fingers a quick hard squeeze.

"Shucks," said he, "for my part, we never stopped bein' friends."

"I wonder if she really swatted him with that beanpot full o' face butter," speculated Light Laurie, as he and Smoky Nivette loafed apart from the others in the cool of the evening.

"Shore she deed," said Smoky.

"Whyfor I'd like to know?"

"Me too." Smoky shrugged Gallic shoulders.

"An' what did he lie for thataway? They's another odd number."

"Bill she lak her mebbeso."

"Not Bill—not in a thousand years. He's got too much sense. My Gawd, if that red-headed snip ever hit me with a fancy jar of anythin' I'd make her wish she hadn't. They's some things a gent don't have to take, even from a woman. I'll bet his head feels the size of a tent."

"You bet."

"An' him tellin' us he fell off his hoss! I expect he fell off his hoss all right, but not the way he said. No indeedy. A gent don't fall off his hoss an' collect grass stains on the *back* of his head an' a half-circle cut on the *front* of his forehead at one an' the same time. Nawsir, not in this day, age an' climate. Alla same, I'd like to know the innards o' this business."

"Well," said Smoky slowly, "you tak de beezness wit' de woman een eet, she ees damn hard for you to unnedstan' dat beezness. I know, me. I have woman, plenty woman—sometam too much woman, by gar!—un I know a man weel do t'ing for a woman un he do not know w'y he do eet, but she know w'y. *Sacré nom!* She know all de tam."

CHAPTER XXIII.

RUDY ORISON.

BUCK SNORT disappointed Miss Rowland sadly. She had visualized "something different," and here was the regulation town of the period—a wide,

uneven, and more or less irregular Main Street bordered by false-fronted buildings of logs and rough lumber that were saloons, stores, and a restaurant, and other buildings of similar construction, but lacking false fronts, that were residences, ragged stockades that were corrals, thousands of tin cans that were empty, and three men that were full: of such was the town of Buck Snort on Buck River.

The river sparkled in the sunshine. So did the tin cans and a few broken bottles that had come to a bad end against the forlorn fence that squared in the weather-worn mound above the common grave of the unfortunate rustlers.

Miss Rowland looked at the shattered bottles, at the shaky fence, and at a fleasy dog that sat upon the spot where the headboard had once stood and deliriously scratched himself. A citizen came out of saloon and glanced at Miss Rowland where she sat on her pony between Coryell and Light Laurie. The citizen rubbed his eyes and looked. He stuck his head in at the saloon window and spoke in a low tone to those within. The latter issued in a body and lined the sidewalk to stare and spit and comment in whispers.

"You see," said Coryell, alluding to the grave, "it ain't much to look at."

Miss Rowland's dark eyes, slightly narrowed, slid from the infested and active dog to the spectators on the sidewalk. It is certain that they made less of an impression on her than the dog, but each man promptly felt that she was inspecting him personally and each shuffled his feet or tilted his hat or pulled it forward or pushed it back or poked about his neckband for the tie that was not there—all except one, that is. This one, the citizen who had been the first to observe the on-lookers, spat out his chew, hitched up his trousers, winked at a friend, and strode stolidly out into the street.

"Lo, Bill. Howdy, Light." Thus the citizen, tarrying at the shoulder of Coryell's horse.

Coryell turned a slow head and perceived a gentleman known to him of old, one Rudy Orison, a handsome devil with a warm reputation and a black mustache

which he waxed. Nodding, Coryell spoke briefly in greeting, as did Light Laurie. Not in the least dashed, Rudy Orison laid a slim-fingered hand on the neck of Coryell's horse and grinned brazenly into Coryell's face.

As plainly as if the man had uttered the words, the grin said: "If you think yo're gonna get away without knockin' me down to the lady, you've got another think. I'm a postage stamp an' 'stick' is my middle name."

Coryell was an excellent reader of grins. His hard eyes turned harder.

"I didn't know you'd settled in Buck Snort," said he calmly.

"Yop. Opened me a place here, the Cherry Saloon—faro, black jack, an' a wheel in the back room. Good town, good town, boys lively an' all like that. C'mon over an' have a drink, you an' yore lady friend an' Light."

He nodded familiarly toward Miss Rowland and smiled ingratiatingly. He rather prided himself on his manner toward women, did Rudy Orison. He had always had a way with him—and them. But Miss Rowland looked through him, beyond him. For her he simply did not exist.

"Not to-day," drawled Coryell simply. "Thank yuh 'most to death. So-long."

With his knee he nudged Ranger's shoulder, and Mr. Orison was forced to leap aside to avoid being trampled.

"Whatsamatter with yuh?" he demanded wrathfully. "Cantcha hold on to yore own hoss?"

"Sometimes," he was told. "Oh, yes, indeedy, an' now an' then, but you know—hosses are a heap uncertain. They're like men folks thataway. Djever notice it? Nemmind, you will."

He chirruped to Ranger, picked up Miss Rowland and Light Laurie with his eyes, and the three rode away up the street in the direction whence they had come. Mr. Orison gazed after them with puckered brow. Slowly he returned to the sidewalk and his friends.

"Who is she?" gravely inquired the friend he had winked at the outset.

"Yeah, what's her name, Rudy?" put in a second before he could reply to the

first. "Where does she come from, an' why?"

Mr. Orison halted dead in his tracks and smiled and caressed the tiny points of his waxed mustache. He knew very well that they upon the sidewalk had heard every word that had passed between him and Coryell. But he was determined to put a good face on the matter.

"Pretty, ain't she?" said he.

"All o' that," another assented dryly. "Yore friends seemed glad to see you. We all noticed how they fell on yore neck. The drinks are on you, Rudy."

"Go on," laughed Mr. Orison. "Make alla fun yuh like. You didn't see the smile I got."

"Smile hell!" scoffed a doubter, a plumpish man with porcine eyes.

Mr. Orison was no weak sister. "I didn't catch that, Piggy," said he frostily.

"Well, her back *was* toward us," admitted the doubter, taking water hurriedly. "Maybe—"

"Shore," assented Mr. Orison easily. "She smiled at me all over her face. Bill Coryell—him with the head bandaged on the chestnut hoss—Bill Coryell he seen it an' wouldn't introduce me. He's jealous, thassall."

"Maybe she's his wife," said a practical-minded individual, wedging his teeth into a scarred plug of tobacco.

"No," denied Mr. Orison, "she ain't nobody's wife. They wasn't no weddin' ring on her left hand. She's pretty enough to be 'most anythin'."

"Yo're welcome to her," declared the practical man, returning the plug to his boot-leg. "I wouldn't have no truck with the best-lookin' woman in the territory. Not me. I know when I'm well off, I do."

"That's real good o' you, Sam, to turn her over to Rudy thisaway," a fat man in Minnesota overalls commented sarcastically. "But I don't guess," he added dryly, "that they's much chance o' Rudy's gettin' her."

"If I had half a chance I'd shore show you old mud-turtles some action," was the pronouncement of the stung Mr. Orison. "By Gawd, it would be a pleasure to show

you bumps in the path o' progress what a expert in that line can do when he whirls his rope."

"I expect," said the overalled fat man gently—"I expect. But did I hear some gent say the drinks was on you, Rudy?"

"You shore did," slipped in the thirsty one who had made the statement. "An' I'm still sayin' so—not meanin' no offense," he added, taking thought on the peculiar look in Mr. Orison's eye.

"Puttin' it that way," said the latter, "they's only one thing to do. All promenade to the bar."

"Bill Coryell," remarked the plumpish man chattily, as he set down his glass. "That's the feller owns the Staple Box—the gent they say has been rustlin' an' raisin' hell around."

"They say a helluva lot," cut in the fat man wearing Minnesota overalls. "An' some folks believe everythin' they hear."

"Well, I heard so," defended the plumpish man. "Coombsy—"

"Coombsy's a old woman. He dunno he's alive." The fat man stared at the plumpish man.

"I didn't know you was a friend of Coryell's," said the plumpish man.

"I ain't. He dunno me, but he's a friend o' my cousin, Tom Jones, the Hatchet coroner, an' he says they ain't a squarer gent livin' than Bill Coryell—or one quicker on the shoot, if that 'll do yuh any good."

The plumpish man subsided.

An hour later the crowd was still drinking—but not on the house—when an up-river rancher pushed in and draped himself against the bar.

"Passed a helluva funny camp about five miles out," said the rancher after his second drink, to the roomful in general. "Pack train an' three men an' two women with a big ol' tent an' cots an' a lot o' books in a bookcase an' a bath-tub an'—"

"Who was in the bath-tub?" interrupted the fat man.

But the question was lost in the shuffle of shouts from the incredulous multitude.

"Don't give Tobe another drink, Jake," Sam implored the bartender. "He's had

a plenty before he got here. Cots an' bookcases an' bath-tubs! Next thing he'll be seein' red-tailed lizards with pink ears, an' we'll have to tie him down."

"I tell yuh I seen 'em!" squalled the maligned Tobe. "I seen them things—all of 'em! They're camped up there at the bend where all them box elders grow!"

"Lookit, Tobe," Sam said earnestly, "do you see any cunnin' lil purple spiders playin' leapfrog on the bar?"

"Them's Riley's spiders," corrected the fat man. "He's always pickin' 'em off himself when he has the delirious treemors. More likely Tobe's is snakes, yaller for choice with blue eyes. How about it, Tobe? Is they one o' them hell-crawlers in that bottle? Look out! It 'll bite you!"

Tobe set down his glass with such force that he smashed it.

"Listen here!" he roared. "I seen them things, an' I can prove it, an' I got twenty dollars that says I can, too! Twenty dollars, you chuckle-heads, twenty round silver wheels o' white man's money that says I seen what I seen! C'mon, lessee the complexion o' yore coin. Put up or shut up. Crow or get off the fence. Well, what's th' matter with yuh?"

Back braced against the bar, he faced his friends expectantly.

"I'll just take—" began Sam, reaching down into a hip pocket.

"Say," interrupted Rudy Orison, "did one o' them women have red hair, an' was she young an' pretty as all hell?"

"Correct," said the rancher.

"Yore girl, all right, Rudy," pronounced Sam, withdrawing his hand—empty—from his hip pocket. "I'm believin' Tobe now. That girl's a towerist—that's what."

"Towerist or no towerist," dashed in the fat man, "this carrot-top an' her friends are campin' near town. Did I hear Rudy say a while back that he'd show us bumps 'on a mud-turkle what a real live expert in the lady-killin' could do *provided* he had half a chance?"

"Yore hearin's fine," said Mr. Orison, acknowledging the corn. "Tha's what I said."

"Here's the longed-for chance." The fat man smiled oilily and folded his fat hands upon his fat stomach.

"Shore," admitted Mr. Orison, his heart beginning to knock, for well he knew that Bill Coryell was a cold proposition. Mr. Orison possessed an abundance of assurance and more than a little courage. All of which did not materially alter the fact that Bill Coryell was a cold proposition.

To Mr. Orison it seemed that the air was turned on a sudden chilly. But he had made his boast.

"Shore," Mr. Orison repeated with a fine assumption of heartiness, "I said I'd show you rousy jiggers some action. But these things take time. Yuh can't bat a woman over the head and say, 'Come along with me,' an' have her eatin' out of yore hand ten minutes later. I ain't no magician. I never said I was. Slow an' easy turns the trick. But gimme three days, an' I'll have her jumpin' through hoops all same a trained cat."

"Take care you don't get scratched," was the fat man's advice. "How about a lil bet on this deal, Rudy?" he continued briskly. "Of course I expect you'll win, but I don't mind donatin' you a handful o' the jingly. I figure on anyways gettin' a run for my money."

"Hownell you gonna decide any bet?" demanded Mr. Orison. "You can't come down to their camp an' set round on yore hunkers an' keep cases on me, can yuh? I'll have a hard enough job—I mean a third party always burns the biscuit thataway."

"I expect," the fat man asserted dryly. "Has this Bill Coryell known you long?"

"Knowed me in Hatchet. Why?"

"Oh, nothin' much. No offense, Rudy, not nohow at all, but with yore rep an' all an' Bill Coryell knowin' about yore fascinatin' ways— Well, I'll go you a hundred even you can't ride with the lady—alone, you an' her together, nobody else but the hosses—through Buck Snort Main Street inside of three days. Huh? Shore, *provided* the red-head at the camp up the river turns out to be the same gave you the *klatawah* a while ago."

"She didn't gimme the *klatawah*. Yo're talkin' more like a idjit than usual. You bet I'll take yuh up on that bet. Inside o' three days watch me bring her all alone but me through Main Street. I got that hundred spent already."

"That's what the jack-rabbit said, but the mud-turkle beat him," chuckled the fat man. "Sam," he went on, turning to the practical-minded individual, "you hold stakes, will yuh? Here's mine." Yore ante, Rudy."

When Mr. Orison had put up, he stretched his arms, expanded his shirt, and said:

"They's no time like now, boys. I guess I'll be driftin' up-river."

The fat man waddled to the rear door and watched Mr. Orison go to the corral and catch up his horse. Further, the fat one did not fail to observe that Mr. Orison, before mounting, looked to the mechanism of the six-shooter he wore in a shoulder holster under his vest.

"Yeah," said the fat man to himself, "Rudy may need that extra ace he's packin' next his shirt before he's through. That Coryell jigger looked like the pure quill to me. I don't guess if he knows Rudy any the gun Rudy's wearin' in plain sight on his leg will fool him much. No, I guess not."

"Not hopin'," he added virtuously, "that Rudy loses more'n a lil skin. Still, it's lucky Sam is holdin' the stakes. I'd shore hate to have to collect from Rudy's heirs."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SCUFFLE.

IN the mean time Mr. Orison was riding up-river. And as he rode the mildest name he called himself was "fool." What could he have been thinking of, to put himself into such a position? Bill Coryell was not the person to stand nonsense of any kind whatsoever. He, Mr. Orison, was in a fair way to meet trouble, if not his death. Mentally he resolved, should he live, to tone down the utterances of his mouth.

But it was not solely Coryell that gave him food for thought. Suppose he should cold-deck Coryell with *that* concealed six-shooter. Neither Smoky Nivette or Light Laurie would be disposed to watch this questionable proceeding unmoved. Either or both would do the obvious thing. Involuntarily Mr. Orison turned in the saddle to take a last look at Buck Snort.

He could not see the place. An enterprising growth of cottonwoods intervened. He looked up at the sky. There was not a cloud in sight. But there was no brightness in the sunshine for Mr. Orison. Gray, gray, all was gray and lowering and depressing. Mr. Orison ached with self-pity. Clenching his fist, he beat upon the saddlehorn and cursed his vanity, himself, the red-haired girl, Bill Coryell, Smoky Nivette, Light Laurie, and Tobe, the rancher who had brought in the news of the camp.

No hint of his thoughts appeared on the face of Mr. Orison when he arrived at the bend where the box-elders grew. Neither Coryell nor the red-haired girl were visible, but sitting on a camp chair in front of the tent was some one he knew—Mrs. Rowland of the Two Bar.

By virtue of a horse bought out of her corral, she having herself made the sale, he could claim acquaintance with her. What luck! Everything was all right now—again the weather was wonderful.

"H' are yuh, Mis' Rowland?" was his bright-eyed greeting. "I'm shore glad to see yuh."

"Are you?" she said, none too cordially. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothin'—nothin' at all," he assured her, dismounting and dropping the reins over his horse's head. "I heard you was here, so I thought I'd just drop in an' say 'howdy' like."

"Now, that was really thoughtful of you. I'm glad this is merely a friendly call. I thought perhaps you might have some complaint about the Two Bar horse you bought."

"There he stands now." Mr. Orison nodded toward his mount and smiled his satisfaction. "Best hoss I ever had. I wouldn't sell him for half the territory."

At this juncture Smoky Nivette came

round from the rear of the tent and stared hard at Mr. Orison. The latter nodded genially. Smoky grunted and returned whence he came. Mr. Orison unobtrusively sniffed the air. He smelled the odor of bacon frying. He had perceived on his arrival a wavery wisp of wood-smoke climbing above the box-elders behind the tent. That was where Coryell would be probably.

"Better stay to supper," said Mrs. Rowland, who, although she did not like the man, realized what was incumbent upon her. "It's nearly ready, I think."

"Thanks, ma'am, I shore will be tickled to death." He sat on his heels and rolled a cigarette.

He wondered as he talked with Mrs. Rowland who was moving about within the tent. Then the flaps were parted. The red-haired girl stood in the opening. Without haste he looked her up and down. He decided that she was a greater beauty with her hat off than with it on. And Lord knew she had been handsome enough in Buck Snort Main Street. Connie Dawson of Hatchet was the only girl that approached her in looks.

Mrs. Rowland was introducing him.

"Charlotte," said she, "I want Mr. Orison to meet you. My niece, Miss Rowland, Mr. Orison."

Mr. Orison, his hat off, was on his feet at the first word and bowing with the utmost gallantry. He had once worked in a gambling-house in San Francisco, and hence possessed a smattering of the amenities. But he made the mistake of offering his hand, which the lady ignored. Her acknowledgment of the introduction was a murmured word and a slight inclination of her charming head. After which she withdrew to the region behind the tent.

A moment later he heard her laugh. Was that Coryell's voice? He thought it was. But what mattered Coryell now? His teeth were drawn, provided Mr. Orison's approach were not too crude. And Mr. Orison intended to take excellent care that it should not be crude. The Spinning Sister had unexpectedly dealt him a good hand. It would be somewhat worse

than a shame if he could not play it to win. It was with a good heart that he set himself to gossip with Mrs. Rowland.

"Come an' get it!" Thus Light Laurie from the other side of the box-elders.

"Supper, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Rowland, rising. "Aren't you going to unsaddle and hobble?"

"He'll eat when he gets home," Mr. Orison replied carelessly, taking off his hat and carefully parting his hair with his fingers. He wished he had remembered to slap on a little pomade before starting. The flat-plastered curl he wore on his forehead whenever he went to the dance-hall invariably took a woman's eye. However, there remained a trifle of wax on his mustache. Hurriedly he twiddled the points into shape as he followed his hostess.

That supper was, in the language of the country, a boggy ford for Mr. Orison. In the first place, there was conversation with the food. Mr. Orison, following the customs of the only fellow men he knew, invariably ate hastily and in comparative silence. An observant soul (a saloon-keeper must be to survive), he failed not to perceive that the three men neither ate with their knives nor chewed with their mouths open.

He decided contemptuously that traveling in the company of women must be emasculating. Yes indeed, it must be. Why, their finger-nails were clean as their necks! Mr. Orison could not remember the time when he had cleaned his finger-nails, and if he washed below his ears more than once a week it was unintentional. Good God! Were they all in love with this red-haired girl? They must be, to appear so unholily clean. There was no other explanation. There couldn't be—possibly.

Well, let 'em, let 'em. Let 'em all be crazy about her, but let *him* have just ten short minutes alone with Miss Rowland—he'd make her talk. She'd have to. Once she was started, once the Chinese Wall of reserve she had reared between them was breached ever so little, the rest would be easy.

That was it: get her started. It always worked. He knew. He had been there

too often not to know. Still he wished he had been more careful in the matter of his finger-nails and his neck. It was obvious that Miss Rowland was finicky. He should have taken into account that she might be.

He had made a blunder. But then he had not, when he rode from Buck Snort, actually expected to do more than participate in a gun-play. He did his best during the meal to draw Miss Rowland into conversation. Try as he might, grudging monosyllables were his reward. He fell to studying her covertly over the rim of his tin cup. The stuck-up floozie! What was the matter with her? What did she have against him?

He'd never even had the opportunity of offending her—yet. And she treated him either as if he were not present or as a small and irritating child to be put off with short answers.

It was too provoking. Especially as she made no bones of chatting with Coryell and Smoky and Light. He was better-looking than any of the three, and he could talk more fluently. Other women had fallen victims to his charms. Why couldn't she find him attractive? He didn't understand it. But not even his eyes turned sullen. He continued to offer his best.

At the conclusion of the meal Smoky and Coryell, gathering up the plates and cups, forbore to lay so much as a finger on the agateware used by Mr. Orison. The latter rose and followed Miss Rowland and her aunt to the front of the tent. But his expectation of a fresh start with Miss Rowland was promptly shattered by the lady's disappearance within the tent. He was forced to hold the aunt in talk. The latter was bored, and her good breeding failed to completely conceal her feelings. He was bored, but his dissimulation was perfect. He had always been a good poker player.

Into the deadwater of their mutual boredom a call from the dish-washer at the river fell with a splash.

"Hey, there, Orison!" came in Coryell's full-lunged shout. "Bring yore plate an' cup down here, will yuh? I wanna get things cleaned up for the night."

"Shore!" Mr. Orison bawled in reply. "Be right with yuh!"

He carried his cup and plate to the river with alacrity. Perhaps while he was absent Miss Rowland might come out of the tent. Perhaps— He came suddenly through the screen of cottonwoods and stood beside Coryell.

He looked for Smoky, and saw that gentleman vanishing down-stream. Mr. Orison knelt to wash his tableware. When he had rinsed out the last of the sand and added the plate to the pile on the low cutbank and dropped the cup, knife, fork and spoon into the saucepan beside the pile, he tidily brushed off his sandy knees and kicked out his long legs a time or two.

"Gettin' old," he observed jocularly to the silent figure sitting on the edge of the cutbank. "Whenever I kneel down for any length o' time my knees like to crack."

"Yeah," drawled Coryell, fixing Mr. Orison with his blankest stare. "Was you figurin' on spendin' the night?"

"It's a free country," returned Mr. Orison, his facial muscles setting like cement.

"Shore is," Coryell assented heartily. "You never said a truer word in your life, Rudy, an' I expect that's sayin' quite a lot."

"Meanin'?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin', nothin' at all. What would I mean?"

"I was wonderin'."

"You've found out. Lookit, Rudy, an' again not meanin' nothin', what do we have to thank for bringin' your boundin' self into our midst thisaway?"

"I might say *again* it's a free country."

"An' you might say it's none o' my business an' still be right. But I'm curious, Rudy. I ain't askin' questions just to pass the time. I wanna find out. Was it money you wanted? 'Cause if you do, I'll contribute four bits an' Smoky an' Light between 'em will make up the dollar. But if it's about that drink we didn't take, why—"

Imperceptibly, Coryell had been gathering his legs under him. As he uttered the word "why" he sprang. Mr. Orison's surprised fingers closed on the butt of the six-shooter in the shoulder holster, but

Coryell's grip was on his wrist. Coryell's other arm was round his waist. With a scrape and a heave Coryell backheeled Mr. Orison and threw him heavily. Coryell sat astride his partly stunned adversary and carefully removed both guns. These he tossed up on the cutbank.

"If you'd wore that outside six-shooter on yore left leg instead o' yore right," Coryell remarked, "you might 'a' had a chance. I was a mite slow gettin' a hold o' that left hand. Hells bells, Rudy, don't look so sorrowful! Don't you guess I've always knowed about that six you pack in a shoulder holster? Shore I have. An' I knowed you wouldn't change. Yessir, I says to myself, the minute you spoke to me there in Buck Snort, 'It's the same ol' Rudy, short-horn mustache an' all.' An' damn if it ain't."

"Now don't go to squirmen' an' wrigglein' all over the place, Rudy. You won't really travel nowhere, an' you'll wear out yore pants somethin' terrible. I ain't done talkin' yet. Quite a spell since you an' me had a chance to say howdy, an' I feel like chatterin'."

"About yore visitin' us thisaway. Of course we're all tickled to have yuh. Yore smilin' face is a addition to any society gatherin', an' you don't eat much, but you talk like a house afire free an' continuous, an' you're always ready to whirl yore rope. That's just it, Rudy, ol' settler. The point I'm tryin' to make simmers down to this: you talk too much. You got too much to say, an' to the wrong people. An' you're too fascinatin', Rudy."

"Them gunnin' lil spiky jiggers you wear on yore upper lip are regular follow-me-girls, an' no mistake. But they don't make no impression at all on the wrong people. See? Yore weakness, Rudy, is in pickin' the wrong people sometimes. This is one of the times. Hold still, you handsome bluff. An' don't try to chaw my hand, or I'll shore have to smear you one on the snoozer. That's better. Well, I *will* move if it hurts yuh to breathe. How's this? Don't breathe with yore stummick, do yuh? Aw, don't be so pernickety! I never seen nobody so hard to please."

"Listen here, Rudy, I don't want no

trouble with yuh. I'm peaceable myself, an' I aim to live thataway, an' now here you come traipsin' along an' spoil everythin'. Yup, Rudy, when you come hornin' in with yore uncalled-for remarks on the weather an' such I feel just like I was entertainin' a skunk. It's a heap hard on the skunk to compare him with you, but it's the best I can think of spontaneous.

"Remember, Rudy, how one day in the Engle House in Hatchet you was boastin' high, wide an' handsome of what you could do with a woman, give you half a chance an' a lil time? Any woman, you said, an' you didn't leave nothin' to the imagination. Takin' all them things into consideration, Rudy, you hadn't oughta go visitin' much. Nawsir, you'd oughta stay home more in yore own private pig-pen with the other hogs, if they is any other hogs of yore particular breed, which is doubtful.

"An' to put the hat on the climax, an' not to leave you guessin' how you stand with this outfit, I'm tellin' you now I don't want you round, an' I ain't gonna have you round, an' I'm so dead set on gettin' my own way that the only wagon-track out is downin' you if I catch you in the neighborhood. If this sort of rough talk hurts yore lil pink feelin's, Rudy, you gotta make allowances for a feller who ain't had all yore advantages."

"Say, for Gawd's sake!" cried Rudy, "I'd just as soon be shot as talked to death. I ain't a damfool. I can catch the drift o' what yo're tryin' to say without yore beatin' it in with a club or sittin' on me till I'm mashed flat. An'—"

"Not so loud!" cautioned Coryell, prodding Mr. Orison in the ribs with no ungentle fist. "Yo're raisin' yore voice with every word. I don't want the women to hear. Yap away, if you feel you gotta make a speech, but don't get noisy."

"I'm through, an' so are you, if you only knowed it. Lemme get up."

"Not yet you ain't, an' I ain't an' after a while. I'm just tellin' you for yore own good to keep away. After that she's yore funeral. When I let you up, you'll find yore valuable cayuse the other side o' these cottonwoods. I thought maybe you'd be

leavin' us, so I asked Smoky to bring him down from where you left him. Don't bother about sayin' good-by to Mis' Rowland. It ain't necessary. Just crawl yore hoss, feller, an' punch the breeze."

Coryell, rising from his seat upon Mr. Orison's anatomy, released the other's wrists and took position on the cutbank within easy reach of the two Orison sixshooters.

Mr. Orison sat up and rubbed tenderly to restore the circulation in his aching wrists. It was with pain that he moved his arms, and the small of his back hurt, as did his shoulder-blades. He stared sullenly at Coryell.

"About my keepin' out o' yore sight," said Mr. Orison—"it's a free country."

"To use yore favorite words," nodded Coryell. "All I gotta say is, help yoreself, Rudy. They's plenty puddin' for everybody. Y' only need a spoon, feller."

"I got a spoon all right—don't fret about that. This ain't the only day in the year."

"Nor yet in two years, when you stop to think. If yo're gettin' up, don't walk too close to these six-shootin' spoons of yores till I get 'em unloaded. Wait a shake, an' I'll give 'em to yuh. Aw, shut up, you must think I'm crazy! Listen! If yo're still wantin' to shoot it out tomorrow I'm ridin' into Buck Snort alone. Nemmind what time. They's no sense in givin' you too many cards at a clatter.

"Soon's I get in, if I don't see you round, I'll send word over to the Cherry that I'm in town. An' I'll wait for you at the head o' Main Street. Then all you gotta do is come out in the street an' start walkin' toward me, settin' yore guns goin' whenever you feel like it. There's a proposition for a reasonable man. How about it?"

"I'll go yuh," snarled Mr. Orison balefully, as he kned himself up on the cutbank.

"Aw right. That's fine. Here's yore artillery, an' yore hoss is waitin' for yuh, an' they ain't a thing more to hold yore interest round here that I can see. Pass right out through the cottonwoods, Rudy. I'm close behind. 'Foot in the stirrup an'

hand on the horn, best damn cowboy ever was born.' So-long, Rudy, so-long."

Coryell watched Mr. Orison out of sight before returning to the cutbank for the dishes and the saucepan. Here, sitting where he had been sitting between the dishes and the guns, he found Miss Rowland.

She did not turn her head as he came up behind her.

"Nice evenin'," he said dryly, and stooped to pick up the pile of dishes and the saucepan.

"Sit down," said she. "I want to talk to you."

He obeyed, wondering.

She turned, her body braced on one propped arm, and faced him.

"Why did you drive that man away?" she demanded.

"Did you hear anythin' of my talk with that feller?" he countered.

"Nearly all of it. I had an idea when you called to him that you might have some such Quixotic notion as this in your mind."

"If you heard then you don't need to ask why."

"But I do. I'm perfectly capable of managing the men I don't like. I didn't like this Orison person, but I could have put him in his place without help."

His blue eyes were hard as flint. The features of a wooden Indian displayed more expression than his own at that moment.

"Some men ain't fit to breathe the same air as you breathe," he told her dispassionately. "His lookin' at you even was by way of bein' a insult. Puttin' it plain, Miss Rowland, yo're sort of under my charge, an' yo're gonna be looked after whether you like it or not. I may be Quixotic, as you call it, but you better believe Rudy Orison ain't no windmill."

"So you know your Cervantes, do you?"

He was taken aback for an instant, and showed it. But only for an instant.

"Cervantes?" was his query. "What's that?"

"It doesn't matter. It wouldn't do any good to ask, and I'm not the prying kind,

anyway. Some day perhaps you'll tell me of your own accord."

"Tell you what?" He looked blank.

"Nothing. Are you going to Buck Snort to-morrow?"

"How long did you say you'd been listenin'?"

"Are you going?"

"Shore."

"You, mustn't. I forbid it."

"I hate to disoblige yuh, but—"

"It isn't necessary—your going—and I won't have it. I won't have you fighting over me! It's abominable and silly."

"It may be all them things, but I ain't fightin' over you exactly. Shucks, no. I can't help it if Rudy Orison is a quarrelsome jigger. I can't—"

"I heard you yourself offer to meet him in Buck Snort."

"It was the least I could do. I had to offer to shoot it out, didn't I?"

"You didn't have to! You didn't have to start the fight in the beginning. Violence! Always violence! Lord, you men make me tired! You seem to think nothing can be accomplished without violence. Oh, I know I've a beastly temper and throw things when I'm roused, but that's no reason for you to fly off the handle. Where's your philosophy now? What do your hills think of you carrying on in this idiotic way? Tell me that!"

"I—I expect maybe they'll have to excuse me this once."

"They won't have to excuse you. You are not going to Buck Snort. You big simpleton! I suppose you think that by shooting Orison or getting shot yourself you're accomplishing something clever and worth while! It's potential murder, that's what it is."

"I'm glad to see you think I've got a chance." Dryly.

"This is no joking matter. I won't have you murdering anybody! I won't have you acting like this Shotgun Blue."

His eyes looked hurt, bewildered. "I wouldn't be murderin' anybody. It's an even break, to begin with, an' a killin' at the last. Killin's no murder, not by a jugful. They's a big difference, a whole heap o' difference."

"But don't you see, you're taking life?"

"Or he does." Calmly.

"Oh, you're utterly callous! No, don't look off into the distance. Look at me. Look me in the eye."

He stared as requested, and found her at the moment more than fair. Her black eyes were sparkling with the excitement that possessed her. Her cheeks were flushed. Her lips, slightly parted, revealed her strong white teeth. Involuntarily he wondered if her round throat was as smooth as it looked.

She leaned toward him, a slim forefinger leveled at his chin. "I want a straight answer to what I'm about to ask you. Is it really to be an even break tomorrow?"

"You heard what I told him," said he resentfully. "Unless he bushwhacks me along the trail some'ers, it will be. You can take it, it will be. I ain't ridin' by the trail."

"But after you reach town, I mean—what then? Are the chances even for both of you?"

"Shore? Why not? What could be fairer 'n the way I put it to him?"

"Deep down in your heart you think—you know—"

"Not in my heart I don't. I got a head—"

"And a thick-skulled affair it is!" she told him, furious at his flippancy, "or you'd realize these efforts at humor are out of place! You know you're faster with a gun than this other man! You expect to beat him to the draw! Don't you? Answer me!"

"Naturally. Wouldn't I be a poor heckler if I didn't?"

"There!" she leaned back triumphantly. "I knew that all your talk of an even break was the worst kind of sophistry. There's nothing even or fair about it. The other man's no match for you. And you dare to differentiate in your facile, smooth-tongued way between killing and murder. There is no difference between the two. Not a particle. Just as sure as that river's full of water, you're planning murder."

"Yo're hysterical."

"I'm not hysterical, and you are befogging the issue. I'm right, and you know it. Oh, it's dreadful! First those Slash K people try to murder you, and now you are trying to murder somebody else on my account!"

"No ma'am; on mine. I never did like Rudy Orison. Him an' me had a old grudge against each other. I wasn't gonna tell you, but—"

"You're lying! You are! You are! Or you'd have told me about the grudge in the beginning. It's all my fault for coming out here. I'm at the bottom of it. Oh, why didn't I stay home where I belonged? I—I wish I'd never been bo-orn!"

She flung herself face downward on the grass and began to weep bitterly into the hollow of her arm. Coryell looked at her helplessly. Then he leaned forward and awkwardly patted her shoulder.

"For goshake not so loud!" he cautioned. "You been whoopin' it up pretty free the last few minutes. They must 'a' heard yuh up at the tent. You'll have yore aunt down here in a minute."

"Leave me alone!" she snuffled, pettishly twitching her shoulders.

Rebuffed, he sat back on his heels, tilted his hat, and scratched his head. Suddenly he smiled a slow, sardonic smile. "Of course it's nothin' to me, but they is one caterpillar, four ants, an' a beetle trackin' across the back of yore shirt."

"What?" Miss Rowland scrambled to her feet and backed toward Coryell. "Brush 'em off!" she commanded. "Be quick!"

At which he could not forbear to snicker as he dabbed perfunctorily at the flannel of her shirt-waist.

"Are they off?" she asked in a strained tone.

"Yep."

She turned, revealing a tear-stained face, and looked down at the ground. "Where's that cat-caterpillar?" she demanded with swift suspicion, her bosom heaving from the effect of her recent emotional outbreak. "And the beetle! Where are they? You—you were lying again! You said that just to—to—"

"Well, I had to make you stop cryin', didn't I?" was his defense. "Yore bawl-in' an' squallin' thisaway is bad for yore—yore health. This is the second cloudburst you've had in less 'n a week. I'm responsible for you, ain't I? I gotta earn my money, ain't I? Well, then."

"Oh!" she choked, and the tears in her blazing eyes were those of rage. "You—you make me— Oh, I hate you!"

But this time she did not look about her for a weapon with which to damage the object of her wrath. Instead, she flung away through the cottonwoods, and as she fled she sobbed stormily.

He was relieved to perceive that her course was taking her up-stream and not toward the camp. He squatted down beside the pile of plates.

"Women," he drawled, regarding fixedly the curling end of a burned match, "are shore hard to please."

A moment later arrived Mrs. Rowland. There was a pucker of worry between the lady's eyebrows.

"Where's Charlotte?" she asked, her anxious gaze sweeping the immediate neighborhood. "I thought I heard her talking as if she were upset about something."

"You did an' she was," replied Coryell, getting to his feet. "She went off up-stream a ways—to cry it off, I guess. She will be all right—so she's let alone."

"What was the matter?"

"Shucks, I dunno. You'll have to ask her."

"Wanted her own way again, I suppose," probed her niece's aunt.

"She always does," Coryell grinned engagingly. "Not that that's anythin' ag'in' her. I don't mean that for a minute. She's all right, an' she's gonna work out all right, an' you can stick a pin in that."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BUSHWHACKER.

MR. ORISON, returning to Buck Snort, put his horse in the hotel corral and went to his saloon for a drink. He felt that he needed it. No

doubt he did. Bellying the bar he found the fat man in Minnesota overalls and the practical-minded Sam. They were shaking poker-dice with the bartender for the drinks.

"What luck?" inquired the fat man.

"Best in the world," replied Mr. Orison gaily. "I grubbed with 'em. Say, that girl's a winner. The Old Crow, Jake."

"I know she's a winner," said the fat man, watching Mr. Orison pour out a stiff three fingers. "When am I gonna lose my money? That's what I wanna know."

"Don't get in a rush. I got a lil time yet. Maybe now to-morrow I'll bring that girl through town, maybe now the day after. Hells bells, I was only able to kiss her once. Whadda you expect?"

"Only once, huh?" Thus the fat man. "Did she know it?" he added skeptically.

"Meanin'?" Coldly.

"Aw, say, Rudy, whadda you take me for? You kissed that girl? You? Don't make me laugh. I got a sore lip."

"Look here—" Mr. Orison began menacingly.

"No offense, Rudy, none at all an' not nohow. But—oh, all right, all right, have it yore own way. I ain't quarreling with nobody who's gonna pay me a hundred round hard wheels inside o' three days. Awⁿ right, you kissed her, an' she kissed you back—all the trimmin's. If I was to ask you where Coryell was at the time, would you hit the ceiling?"

"Coryell? Him? Well, I disremember just where he was. You see, her an' me was sittin' on the river bank behind them cottonwoods, an' we couldn't see the camp."

"Guess you wasn't payin' much attention to no camp," put in the diplomatic bartender.

"You bet I wasn't, nor *she* wasn't neither. I dunno when I've squeezed a better armful."

"I'll bet you don't," was the fat man's dry comment. "Aw, for the luva Mike, Rudy, stop gettin' yore back up! I ain't said nothin', not a thing. Which yo're the most suspicious gent I ever did see, bar none. You got as far as the armful. What's the next chapter?"

"I'll turn that page to-morrow," Mr. Orison replied with a portentous wink. "Name it, gents, name it. Drinks on the house."

Mr. Orison did not go to bed that night. The ashen light of dawn found him sitting on the edge of his cot in the little cubby-hole opening out of the Cherry's back room.

On the table was a low-turned lamp with a smoke-blackened chimney. Scattered upon the floor were the butts of numberless cigarettes and the stubs of burned matches. Upon the table beside the lamp was an unopened box of rifle cartridges. Which box had not come to the table fortuitously. Mr. Orison had bought it the night before. Now he looked at the box, and his eyes were sullen and a little worried.

"I ain't got a chance with him," he told himself for the fortieth time. Not a chance. He's quicker 'n I am by a good deal. An' nobody 'll know."

He rolled and lit another cigarette. His eyes never left the box of cartridges. "Nobody 'll know," he repeated under his breath. "That's the beauty of it. Nobody 'll know for shore. An' even if they did, who's to say it wasn't a even break? An' who can prove anythin' different? An' who'd be *willin'* to prove anythin' different?"

He took the cigarette from between his lips and inspected the glowing tip. But he saw nothing of the smoldering tobacco. Instead he saw his enemy.

"It ain't as if I was as fast as him," he reiterated in justification of that which lay at the back of his mind. "If I was I'd go against him in a minute. Hell, didn't I go down there to the camp *expectin'* a row with him? Shore I did. An' now—now that he's comin' to town to see me, they's only one thing for a sensible man to do. Only one thing, an' I'm gonna do it."

He spat the cigarette upon the floor, extinguished it with the sole of his boot, and reached past the head of the bed to where a Winchester stood leaning against the wall.

He laid the Winchester across his knees,

snicked open the box of cartridges, and began to load the magazine. He went about the business slowly, with clumsy movements. His fingers were all thumbs that morning. The man had never planned deliberate murder before. He was Rudy Orison, gambler, saloon keeper, libertine, not a "bad" man as men were reckoned in the territory, and he felt that he was taking a downward step.

But always he was consoled by the thought that the step was necessary. Life was sweet. The taste of it lingered pleasantly on the tongue. He wanted to live. He meant to live.

With the last cartridge half through the loading-gate he paused and regarded fixedly the low-burning flame of the lamp. "If I was better 'n him, he'd do somethin' like this to me," he muttered. "I know damn well he would. It's only 'cause he knows he's better 'n me he's willin' to shoot it out in Main Street thisaway."

He shoved the last cartridge past the loading-gate and blew out the lamp. Now that he had made the decision, now that he was ready to make a beginning, he experienced an odd species of exhilaration. He felt strangely light on his feet and in his mind. His hands were no longer shaky; every movement was assured.

"So he wouldn't tell me what time he was comin' to town," he sneered as he took his hat from a nail on the wall. "Didn't wanna gimme too many cards, says he. As if I didn't know what way he'd come—the only way he can come unless he wants to ride round Buck Snort Mountain, which ain't likely."

The east was red and yellow and palest lemon below the blue when Mr. Orison went to the hotel corral for his horse. He rode out of town at a lope—heading downstream. This in case any early riser might witness his departure. Behind and below the top of the first rise he altered his course to the left and rode a little faster.

He described a short semicircle round Buck Snort, swung again toward the river, taking care to approach the trail no nearer than a hundred yards, and pelted upstream at a frank gallop. For he wished to reach a certain spot before sunrise.

When he came to the appointed place, a spur of Buck Mountain, where pines and firs grew scattering among long-backed outcrops, he dismounted in a shallow draw at the base of the spur. He rope-tied his horse to a lightning-riven pine and carefully blindfolded the animal. This that it might not whinny. He did not think that Coryell would ride within a quarter-mile of the draw. But one could never be sure of anything in this world. He had long since discovered that great truth. He must leave nothing to chance.

He took his rifle from the scabbard under the left fender and climbed the scraggy side of the spur. The going was not good, and he was soft. He was puffing when he reached the top.

He halted on the ridge a moment to regain breath and wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Then he made his way along between the trees toward the tip of the spur. Which tip, including the slope to the flat below, was not more than six hundred yards from the river.

Arrived at the tip, he lay down behind an outcrop in the shade of a fir with many branches and shoved his rifle forward. He looked down at the flat and up-river with satisfaction. He had picked the one spot between the camp and Buck Snort that Coryell would be compelled to pass within easy rifle range. Knowing Coryell as he did, or thought he did, it was not reasonable to suppose that he would ride round Buck Mountain—an addition of twenty miles to his journey.

Nor would he, or could he if he would, ride the other side of the river where the steep weather-bitten flank of the Hogback ended abruptly at the ragged tops of ninety-foot bluffs that marched in a yellow-white procession above the rapid water.

Of course Coryell might travel in the comparative concealment of the belt of cottonwoods bordering the river. He might, yes; but box-elders and red willow grow among the cottonwoods. In places they grow thickly. They could not be passed without considerable delay and discomfort.

"He'll take a chance," decided the gambler.

Hour after hour he lay there patiently. Now and then he shifted his position. At first he would have enjoyed a smoke. As time dragged on he began to actually crave the comfort of tobacco. But he did not dare. Coryell's eyes were sharp. He would be on the lookout for anything of suspicious origin.

Nine o'clock. Mr. Orison's stomach cried for food. He wished that he had taken at least a bite before leaving town. He made himself a thick cigarette and sucked what solace he could from a dry smoke. A foraging party of enterprising ants crawled down inside his boots and bit his ankles. He had, on account of the heat, discarded socks the previous week. The ants disported at will.

It was too much for Mr. Orison. He rolled over, clawed off his boots without exposing too much of his person above the skyline, and scratched his itching ankles and squashed his tormentors to the last ant. Remaining barefooted for greater comfort, he resumed his watch.

Thirst assailed him. Knowing that he could not obtain water without deserting his post, which contingency was unthinkable, his distress was more severe than it ordinarily would have been. Why the devil hadn't he brought a canteen? And a piece of jerky? Every successive minute added to the mingled pangs of thirst and hunger.

Why didn't Coryell come along and let him get the thing over? What was the matter anyway? He should have come hours ago. Perhaps he wasn't coming. No, he'd come, that was certain. Otherwise he wouldn't be Coryell.

Mr. Orison deliberated, as he unhappily rolled a wretched pebble under his tongue, whether he had better leave the body on the field, sink it in the river, or bury it somewhere on the slopes of Buck Mountain. To bury it or sink it under water would imply guilt, he thought, so he resolved not to approach the corpse, but to return as promptly and quickly as might be to Buck Snort. Yes, that is what he would do, he told himself, crossing one ankle over the other and wriggling his bare toes.

Of compunction for what he was about to do he felt not the least twinge. He was not of those that grip the plow-handles and then look back. Not he, the strict materialist. It struck him as odd that he had hesitated in the beginning. Now, out in the open air, waiting for the supreme and imminent moment, he reflected with scornful contempt upon his former squeamishness.

He shifted his knees, ejected the pebble from his cottony mouth, and mumbled profanely his opinion of Coryell's non-arrival.

And then suddenly Coryell had arrived. Coryell was there at his back, talking to him.

"Lie still," Coryell was saying. "Slide your arms out crossways an' hold 'em steady. Easy now while I get the gun on yore leg. Move yore chin so's I can get at yore rifle. Don't make no false motions, feller. My gun is proddin' the small of yore back, an' I'll just naturally have to blow you apart if you go to gamble with me.

"So now, they's no call to wiggle. I'm only slittin' down yore vest so's I can pry yuh apart from that extra six-shooter you *will* pack under yore arm. Dunno why you carry it. Don't seem to do yuh no good as I can see. There now, Mr. Man, pull in yore arms an' roll over like a good dog."

Mr. Orison rolled over dumbly. He had fallen asleep and was dreaming. That was it. He was having a nightmare. Presently he would awaken.

Coryell, reading the other's bemuddled expression, smiled widely. "You ain't dreamin', ol' settler. This is the truth." He settled his back comfortably against a rock, curled his moccasined feet under him, and rested his six-shooter across his knees.

"Yeah," pursued Coryell in his slowest drawl, "I been expectin' somethin' like this from you, Rudy. I knowed they was only one place—an' that was this spur—where you could lay for me safe an' convenient. So I went up on Buck Mountain last night an' picked me a lookout. I was there this mornin' when you come siftin'

along before sunup an' laid yoreself all out to cold-deck me.

"My Gawd, but you was innocent an' unsuspectin' about it! I had to laugh. But at that, you wasn't so damn foolish. Took me four hours to Injun up on yuh. More'n once I thought you'd hear me. If I hadn't had my rifle I'd 'a' made better time. What's th' matter? Thirsty, huh? Where's your canteen? Well, if you ain't the complete bushwhacker! I drunk mine empty, so pull on yore boots an' we'll go down to the river."

The last few yards to the water Mr. Orison covered at a run. He threw himself stomach-flat on the ten-foot stretch of shore below the cutbank and guzzled and blew and guzzled again.

"Yore insides will bust if yuh swill down any more o' that stuff," cautioned Coryell, roosting on the cutbank like a vigilant hawk. "Yuh don't wanna drink too much. I got a lil job for yuh."

"What?" demanded Mr. Orison sullenly, turning to stare up at his enemy.

"Nothin' much," was the reply. "Only I'm gonna wallop hell out o' you inside o' three minutes an' a half."

"Huh?"

"Shore. Whadda you think? You don't guess for a holy minute I can afford to let you scamper round the landscape bushwhackin' me whenever you feel like it without takin' *some* notice of it, do yuh?"

"Gimme my gun," requested Mr. Orison, "an' I'll shoot it out with yuh."

"Which is just about as cool as anythin' I ever heard. 'Gimme my gun,' says he, 'an' I'll shoot it out with yuh.' You should 'a' thought of that before, feller. You had the chance to shoot it out in Buck Snort, an' you decided to stay out that hand, so now it's a new deal all round. Speakin' personal, I'm just as well pleased. I don't want to down yuh without it's necessary. I'd just as soon give yuh a crackin' good lickin'. C'mon, Mr. Man, stand up on your hind legs an' crawl up here, or would yuh rather take yore medicine down where yuh are? Where y' are? Aw right. Be right with yuh."

Coryell unbuckled his cartridge-belts and laid them with the weapons on the

grass a few feet back from the edge of the cutbank. Then he sprang lightly down to the gravelly shore to confront his adversary.

Coryell's moccasined feet had barely struck the ground when Mr. Orison, stooping swiftly, snatched a bowie from his boot-leg and, with a jerk of his wrist, hurled it straight at Coryell's middle. Coryell dodged. The heavy blade cut through the folds of his shirt and grazed his side. The bone handle spat against his ribs.

Mr. Orison, bitten with affright at the ill success of his throw, scooped up a rock in a flash. But before he could do more than swing back his arm, Coryell was upon him. As has been said, Coryell was no boxer, but he could hit with the strength of a mule's kick. His first blow flattened Mr. Orison's nose and reduced his lips to bleeding pulp.

Mr. Orison went down as if he had been top-mauled. And Coryell went down with him, working both fists without pause. Mr. Orison, spitting blood and teeth, squirmed and kicked and tried futilely to guard his face with his arms. Futilely—because Coryell, for once in his life, had lost his temper completely. He tore away the other's protecting arms, planted his hard knees on the biceps, and hammered, hammered, hammered at that defenseless face.

It soon became apparent to Coryell, his anger having cooled somewhat, that he was thumping a senseless man. Accordingly he ceased operations, brought water and soused Mr. Orison into consciousness.

"Get up," ordered Coryell briefly, prodding the prostrate gambler in the ribs with the toe of his boot.

Mr. Orison sat up. He could observe the progress of events with but one eye, the other being completely closed, but he perceived that his bowie shone dully in the grasp of Coryell. A moment later he felt the point—between his shoulder-blades.

"Get up, I said," repeated Coryell. "How far in do yuh want me to stick this knife?"

The sixteenth of an inch depth to which the steel had penetrated was more than sufficient for Mr. Orison. He got to his feet hastily, swaying.

"If I only had boots on," Coryell declared, "I'd kick you in the pants so hard yore backbone would stick out yore eye."

He shoved Mr. Orison violently toward the bank. Mr. Orison stumbled forward, fell on his hands and knees, then slumped down on his face and cried. The properly disgusted Coryell employed the point of the bowie where it would do the most good.

Mr. Orison rolled over with a shrill scream, clutching at himself and drawing up his legs. Fat tears ran from the corners of his blackened eyes, dripped down his bruised, discolored cheeks, and mingled with the blood that trickled from the pulpy gash that was his mouth.

"Get up, damn you!" cursed Coryell. "Get up, you coyote, or I'll shore make you feel like a pin-cushion!"

Thus adjured, he scrambled up the cutbank and glimpsed before him the piled firearms. But not for jewels and fine gold would he have laid so much as a finger on the weapons. He had learned his lesson—at least for the moment.

"Where's yore hoss?" asked Coryell, when he had picked up the firearms and was pricking the unhappy Mr. Orison into the open. "I'm right behind."

Mr. Orison was not destined soon to forget that walk from the river to where he had left his horse. Frequently various parts of his anatomy were pricked by the bowie in Coryell's hand. When he fell, which was not seldom, for there seemed to be no vitality in him below the waist, he was jabbed deeply and relentlessly till he staggered erect and reeled onward. Once he essayed to flee, and forthwith tumbled headlong over a boulder. After which he proceeded limpingly and tearfully.

Besides his self-possession he had lost his hat. His vest, slit when Coryell took away the extra six-shooter, dangled flappily from his right shoulder. Through a rent in the flannel shirt the skin covering his left shoulder showed scratched and scraped and sticky with blood and dust.

When Mr. Orison came to his horse his shaking fingers scrabbled ineffectually at the horse-knot in the rope. Coryell was forced to unfasten the knot himself.

"Yo're a helluva fine murderer," was Coryell's comment as he coiled the rope and buckled it into the rope-strap on the off-side. "Why don't yuh use a tie-rope instead o' this thing? You got rope enough here to hang a man. There's a idea," he added hopefully. "With any kind o' luck, they'll be usin' it to hang you with yet. C'mon! Get aboard, get aboard! Want me to take the knife to yuh again?"

Mr. Orison did not wish anything of the kind. He scrambled up into the saddle as well as he could and felt blindly for the stirrups with his toes. And as he sat and fumbled the reins with trembling fingers there came to him again that feeling of nightmarish unreality. That was not Coryell standing there; that was a dream-person. This was a dream-horse. And—but, the dream-horse starting toward Buck Snort at the moment, Mr. Orison became aware that he was mistaken again.

It was no dream—it had never remotely approached being one.

A mile from where he had left Coryell the bruised and battered rider turned toward the river. It was his intention to wash off the dust and marks of conflict so far as possible. Crossing the trail, he heard a shout, and a rider came galloping and pulled up at his side. Mr. Orison painfully turned his head.

The newcomer was Coombs, the association detective.

Coombs stared at the awful object that was Mr. Orison with puzzled astonishment.

"Who is it?" asked Coombs. "An' what happened?"

"Hoss dragged me," was the plausible explanation. "Prett' near put my light out."

"Which she's the mercy of hell he didn't," marveled Coombs. "Howdja get loose?"

"He fell, an' I managed to work my foot out."

"Yeah? You was lucky. My Gawd, I never did see such a face in all my born days! Wait till you see it. Yuh won't know yoreself. But who are yuh? Yore voice is familiar, but— Huh! Rudy Ori-

son! Well, I'd never 'a' believed it if yuh hadn't told me. Where yuh goin'? I'll go with yuh. Yuh look like yuh might need help."

But Mr. Orison, sore and aching as he was, did not require assistance. Hence there was nothing for Coombs to do but sit on the bank and smoke while Mr. Orison bathed his many hurts.

"I hear Bill Coryell's round here," Coombs cast at a venture.

"I heard he was," Mr. Orison replied carefully.

"Wonder what he's doin'?"

"Dry-nursin' a couple o' towerist females."

"I know that. Been here long, has he?"

"Few days."

"That's what they said in town. Y' ain't heard of any brand-blottin' goin' on, have yuh?"

Mr. Orison sat up on his heels and, water trickling down his chin, regarded the detective fixedly.

"I thought," Mr. Orison remarked at last, "that you an' Wat Pickett proved they wasn't anythin' against Coryell when you arrested him."

"I dunno what yo're bringin' Coryell in for," protested the detective. "I didn't say nothin' about Coryell. An' we didn't arrest him none anyway. It was just a plain investigation. Didn't prove nothin'."

"So you think Coryell—" began Mr. Orison.

"I ain't sayin' what I think," interrupted the detective. "An' I ain't sayin' nothin' about Bill Coryell in partic'lar."

"Alla same, yo're interested about any brand-blottin' in these parts," persisted Mr. Orison.

"Naturally. It's what I'm paid for."

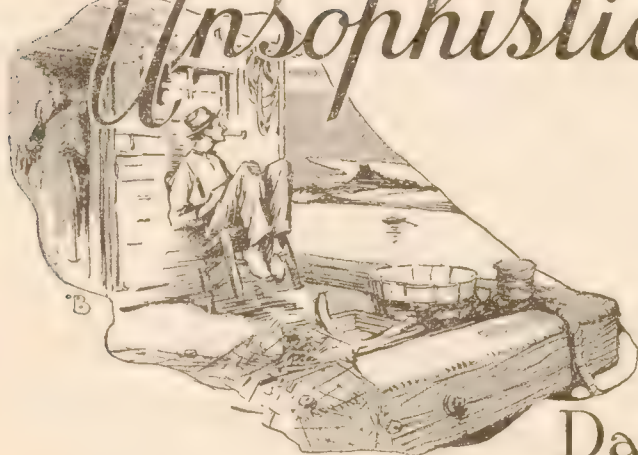
"Yeah, an' I hear you always earn yore money. Aw right, I'm willin' to help you earn it. I got no more use for a brand-blotter than you have. I'll keep my ears open; an' my eye. I might hear or see somethin'. You never can tell."

"No," said Coombs, the association detective, as he poured the tobacco into a grooved paper. "You never can tell."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Unsophisticated

by
Clinton
Dangerfield



"ANYBODY," remarked Mr. Sterringer, waving a contemptuous cigar, "could put one over on these Florida cracker boobs!"

Mr. Sterringer was a heavy, muscular individual who made one feel that his beef bill would be large, and who walked so fast that he undoubtedly made a cracker crowd look as if it were standing still. He had a short mustache, which didn't hide a mouth always occupied in punishing a big cigar.

His companion, Alonzo Vernon Lee, offering no objection to the estimate on Floridians, stopped his pickax in its phosphate prospecting, wiped the sweat from his long, red face, and said plaintively:

"Let's quit for a few minutes, and rest in the shade. Th' Almighty, He took an' made the shade for to rest in."

"Don't try to put one over on me, Lee! Not noon yet, and this stuff is showing up splendid. I've had it assayed. It's extra fine rock, and a short haul spur would put it on the water route."

"Did you hire me up thar in South Georgy to kill me down here in Floridy?" inquired Mr. Lee pathetically.

"No, to work," grunted Mr. Sterringer.

"I ain't a houn' dawg!" Mr. Lee protested, reluctantly picking at the lead. "Remember, I got a family to support! Nothin' would do you but to fetch Liza Lou an' me, an' the twins down here."

"We had to have your wife to cook for us," retorted Mr. Sterringer, repressing a shudder as he thought of that lady's culinary efforts.

Mr. Sterringer had astutely hired his assistant over the border, Mr. Lee assuring him he knew "nothin' of Florida, but that he was plumb seasoned to any kind of weather and a powerful strong worker." As a matter of fact, up to eleven in the morning Mr. Lee worked well. After that he was affected by ingrowing inertia.

Liza Lou, the yearling Lee twins, Mr. Lee, and Mr. Sterringer occupied a shack deserted by some forgotten hunter in the wilds. They had taken temporary possession until Mr. Sterringer should be done with his secret prospecting. The shack was perhaps a mile from the surface phosphate mining.

It was now eleven thirty, and Mr. Lee was earnestly wishing that his wife would appear with a basket of dinner. Mr. Sterringer heartlessly refused to go home for the midday meal, experience having taught him that if he did it would be hours before he could pry Mr. Lee loose from his tilted-back chair.

The latter continued mournfully:

"I ain't been the same man sence I got chill un' fever on them Georgy creek bottoms. Do you-uns have chill un' fever in Shickkaggy?"

"*C-h-i-c-a-g-o*. For the Lawd's sake pronounce it like a city, though it ain't fair to expect it of you! You never saw anything bigger than a village that would be a fly-speck in Chicago."

As the sun passed into its zenith, Mrs. Lee duly appeared, walking with languid steps. She always ate her own dinner at eleven, after which she arranged the plump, lazy twins on their pallet of quilts and gave them each a piece of fat meat to suck. The meat had a string tied through it—the other end of the string being secured to the infant's largest right toe, so that it could not possibly swallow the intriguing morsel and run the risk of choking. She left the children alone as confidently as a wild goat leaves its young.

She loved to carry the dinner and watch the men eat. Sometimes she lingered after they went to work again. She did so this afternoon, sitting hunched on the ground in thick shade, a spray of jasmine tickling one ear, her arms dreamily clasping her knees, her bonnet hung on a tangle of Cherokee roses growing near by. The discarding of the bonnet revealed a really lovely face, too pallid, but a perfect oval gemmed with fine dark eyes. The mouth was sweet, tender, red, but her teeth were discolored with the cracker's inevitable snuff. At her throat glittered a huge, green-glass breastpin bought with snuff coupons. She was twenty-four to Mr. Lee's thirty-five.

That gentleman let her stay half an hour after work was resumed; then he stopped his pick to observe dominantly, almost briskly:

"Old woman, you don't want to be lazin' around here! Git on home, er my supper won't be hot time I git thar."

"I like it here, Lonny," whined Mrs. Lee. "Thar's time enough."

"There ain't," interrupted Mr. Lee inflexibly. "Git along home, old woman."

Meekly Mrs. Lee arose, took her sunbonnet, and draggled homeward. Mr. Lee turned to find Mr. Sterringer gazing at him with a touch of real respect.

"It looks," said Mr. Sterringer wistfully, "as if you've got your wife in subjection."

"Why, of co'se."

Mr. Sterringer groaned at the "of course." Then he asked sharply:

"Your neighbors in your piny-woods settlement where I hired you, were their wives in subjection, too?"

"Why, of co'se."

Mr. Sterringer groaned again. There was something so reminiscent in the sound that Mr. Lee, seizing the chance to delay his pickax, drawled inquiringly:

"What's ailin' you? Ain't the wimmen folks in Shickkaggy obedient to their husbands?"

Mr. Sterringer dropped his pickax and staggered up against a tree. Then he recovered slightly. "Say, if an obedient wife could be found in little old Chi she'd be preserved on a gold pedestal and hung with diamonds as big as cart-wheels!"

"Wa-al," drawled Mr. Lee, "hit sounds to me like you-all done let your wimmen folks git away from you—out 'o' hand—like runaway hosses!"

"Out of hand! *Good night!* They gallop all over us!" He eyed Mr. Lee with rising envy and then demanded eagerly: "What would you have done if your lady had told you to get your own supper?"

"I'd 'a' took a peach switch to her."

"And get pinched by a cop! And have your mug in the papers as a prize fiend!"

"Cop? Mug?" Mr. Lee was patently bewildered.

"Police," interpreted Mr. Sterringer. "Face."

"Oh—police. Them fellows in blue! I never seen any except wunst on a trip to Savanny. Would they come intrudin' into a man's own house?"

"Great guns! Say—I see we *do* pay a price for civilization! But this ain't working."

"I ain't a houn' dawg," protested Mr. Lee again, but he thrust in a reluctant shovel. The soft call of the lazy woods, the idle lapping of tiny waves in a blue lakelet near by made him feel that all work was an almost intolerable nuisance. But he wanted to buy a "second-hand" house-boat, this kind of domicile being his ideal method of existence. For this purchase money was necessary.

Above him as he worked, a couple of tall palmettos leaned their slim, gray stems toward the shimmering gray-white pit the men had excavated, as though curious to discover why any one should desire to labor. Convolvuli and railroad vine crept sleepily up to the pit's edges, and a thicket of pines stood listless—seeming to perspire a spicy fragrance in the warm air. Butterflies drifted by them so drowsily that the mere sight of them made Mr. Lee feel like nodding.

It was next day when they quit work for supper that Mr. Lee, shuffling homeward, the song of a Florida mocker in his large ears, inquired of Mr. Sterringer:

"What caused you for to think there was phosphate in this here land?"

"I belong to the Wayoffyonder Fishing Club. Every year we fish like the devil for two weeks. One of the fellows was up in geology. We happened to be alone here together. He said he was sure there was phosphate. That it would only take shallow prospecting. Wanted me to go in with him."

"Wa-al, what did you do with your buddy?"

"My what?"

"Your fishin' pardner."

"Say—what do you think I am? The latest in crime records? Not on your life! Everything I do is legal. His wife got ill. He went hurrying back to her. I beat him to the phosphate. Perfectly legal."

"Why, certainly—that wouldn't lay you liable to nothin'—unless the owner complained of trespassin'—and that ain't more'n a misdeemeaner. But is this here phosphate owned by anybody?"

"Sure, it's owned! Don't waste your energy asking me who owns it, because I wouldn't tell you. But if you knew, it wouldn't get you anywhere," he added quickly. "I got a three months' option which I'll take up next Wednesday. Don't ask me where I'll meet the owner, because I won't say!"

"How much does the fellow git for the land?"

"About two hundred dollars," grinned Mr. Sterringer.

"But if you didn't have no option—and he axed you t-t-t-ten thousand dollars."

"I'd rustle it up. Betchu sweet life. But the poor boob won't ask it. Twice last year he tried to sell for two hundred. He belongs to *your* geologic strata," added Mr. Sterringer with fine sarcasm.

"I reckon he wouldn't even have sense enough to beat his buddy to a good thing arter his buddy informationed him about it," agreed Mr. Lee cheerfully. Then he licked his lips. "But if the fellow did have ten thousand dollars, he'd be independent rich for life!"

"Rich for life!" Mr. Sterringer laughed raucously. "Why, you poor nut, at the very best it wouldn't give him but five hundred dollars a year income!"

"Last year," Mr. Lee observed in a mildly speculative tone, "it cost me ezzactly seventy-five dollars to suppute my family for them twelve months."

"Great guns, you're bug-house; or you didn't have enough to eat!"

"Why, there's all kinds of fish, er oysters and game to be had fer the takin' in the right localities. We was on my house-boat then. That's the onliest way to live. But the Lovely Dove, hit was my ole woman named her, got sold by my wife's fust cousin wunst removed. He sold her. He was gittin' ready to go out West. He's out thar now. I hope he fries in that Panhandle country. I'm aimin' to buy another houseboat, soon as I kin save up a little. Then we'll start in on the Injun River. House-boats don't pay no rent. Moorin's is free. We got to have flour, tobaccy, and sugar—them's about all the store-bought groceries."

"But your family has to wear things. There's hats. A woman has to have a spring hat—a summer hat—a fall hat—a winter hat—"

"No, man," interrupted Mr. Lee, "ever was dotin' enough to buy his woman that many hats in one little ole year! Hats! Liza Lou was married in a hat. But there ain't been no occasion to buy her another. Powerful pretty it was—set off by this here wide lace and hand-made flowers. If we're goin' anywhere special, she wears the hat. Other times she has allus got a sunbonnet."

"But—gowns," suggested Mr. Sterringer feebly.

"Gowns?"

"Her dresses. They must cost something."

"Oh, dresses. I git Liza Lou two calicoes a year an' all the calico she needs for the chillun. Chillun won't wear but one garment at a time. Under-garments for me and Liza Lou cost a few dollars a bolt. She cuts and makes 'em jes' as she cuts and makes my workin' pants and shirts. But I got me a store-bought Sunday suit, and one for her. Cose we don't wear 'em excepting for perticular occasions. That feller with five hundred dollars a year—why, he—why—"

II.

LAWYER LIGGETT'S prosperous Jacksonville office, sunny, clean, was presided over by a stylish blond with yellow ear-muffs, a carefully powdered nose, and manicured touch-system fingers.

She glanced with interest at Mr. Sterringer's smart suit and diamond pin as Lawyer Liggett cordially greeted him on Wednesday.

"Exactly on time, Mr. Sterringer! Your party, Mr. J. C. Snaily, is waiting for you in my inner office. He understands you are buying farm land for the benefit of a poor relation whom you want to place in Florida. Admirable action on your part! Miss De Bruce, kindly ask Mr. Snaily to come out." Then, as Miss De Bruce vanished: "I told him he'd be extremely fortunate to get two hundred dollars for a chunk of unimproved Florida land. I've known it sell for twenty-five cents an acre. Oh, here he is. Mr. Snaily, allow me to introduce to you Mr. Sterringer, of Chicago. You two gentlemen—why, what on earth's the matter, Sterringer? Aren't you well?"

"This is *not* Mr. Snaily!" wildly objected Mr. Sterringer. "This here person is my hired man—Alonzo Vernon Lee—that's Liza Lou, his wife, with him."

Brisk Lawyer Liggett stared sharply. Then he said hastily:

"Oh—ah—as to any confusion of names, Mr. J. C. Snaily has explained to me that he inadvertently got into several—er—arguments with parties on a certain west

coast river. So here on the east coast and over the border, he, for discreet personal reasons, used a—er—temporarily assumed name. It appears those arguments are now all happily settled. The—er—irritated parties were swamped in a hurricane off Harney River. Mr. Snaily does not need his incognito any longer. I presume," beamed Lawyer Liggett, glad to have elucidated matters satisfactorily and willing to make a little joke, "that such a fancy name as Alonzo Vernon Lee must have been too pleasing to the ear to be given up readily."

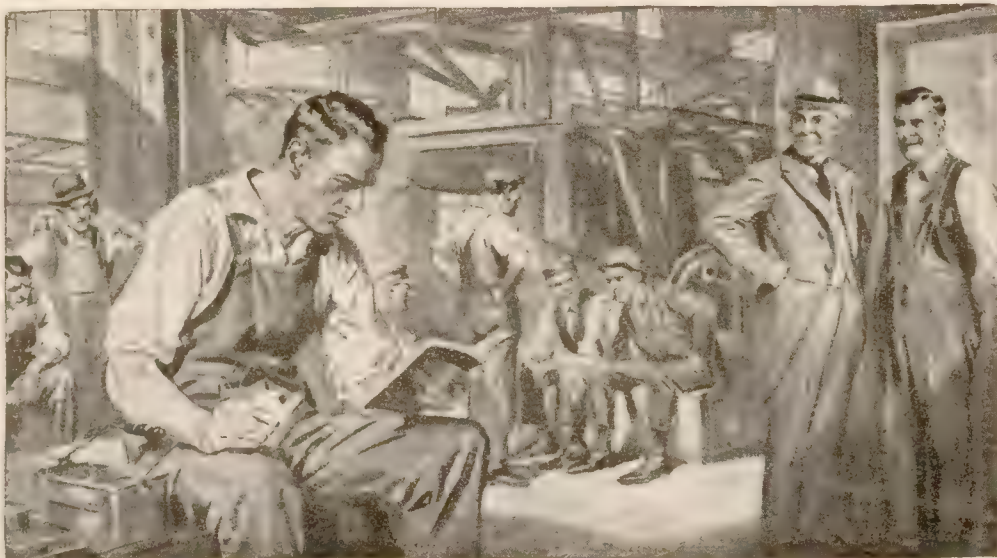
"Hit was Liza's choice of a name," drawled the late Mr. Lee, "and the fancifulness of it wasn't no expense to me, an' wimmen folks has to be humored wunst in so long."

Miss De Bruce was gazing with fascinated horror at the humored Mrs. J. C. Snaily's hat—a yellowed concoction ornamented with yards of dingy cotton lace and bunches of strange, faded flowers. But Miss De Bruce had to admit the eyes it shaded were of liquid beauty, and that the red lips were like fresh strawberries. On those same lips rested a happy smile.

"Of course the ladies have to be humored," Lawyer Liggett pleasantly agreed. "But now, gentlemen, to business. Mr. Snaily, my client, Mr. Sterringer, is buying this land for a poor relation, as I explained to you, whom he generously wishes to provide with a small farm. But he feels he can't pay out more than two hundred dollars on such charity—why, Mr. Snaily, you don't find a pathetic case like that amusing, do you?"

"I'm jest a-smiling at life in geenal," affirmed Mr. J. C. Snaily drawlingly. "But as to price—seein' as I ain't never giv' no option—yet, never was a hawg—I'll take ten thousand dollars—no more and no less."

There is now a house-boat, on the Indian River, which contains Mr. J. C. Snaily, Liza Lou, the twins, four other children, and much drifting content. Not yet has the late Mr. Lee succeeded in spending his full income, so each year he puts the residue into a sock—because some day there will be a dozen tow-heads and perhaps a larger boat.



“Keep Your Eye on Jim!”

“It’s not alone what a man does *during* working hours, but *outside* of working hours—that determines his future. There are plenty of men who do a good job while they’re at it, but who work with one eye on the clock and one ear cocked for the whistle. They long for that loaf at noon and for that evening hour in the bowling alley. They are good workers and they’ll always be just that—ten years from now they are likely to be right where they are today.

“But when you see a man putting in his noon hour learning more about his work, you see a man who won’t stay down. His job today is just a stepping-stone to something better. He’ll never be satisfied until he hits the top. And he’ll get there, because he’s the kind of man we want in this firm’s responsible positions. You can always depend on a man like Jim.

“Every important man in this plant won out in the same way. Our treasurer used to be a bookkeeper. The sales manager started in a branch office up state. The factory superintendent was at a lathe a few years ago. The chief designer rose from the bottom in the drafting room. The traffic manager was a clerk.

“All these men won their advancements through spare time study with the International Correspondence Schools. Today they are earning four or five times—yes, some of them *ten* times as much money as when they came with us.

“That’s why I say that Jim there is one of our future executives. Keep your eye on him. Give him every chance—he’ll make good!”

Employers everywhere are looking for men who really want to get ahead. If you want to make more money, show your employer that you’re trying to be worth more money. If you want more responsibility, show him you’re willing to prepare yourself for it.

For 29 years the International Correspondence Schools have been training men and women right in their own homes after supper, or whenever they had a little time to spare. More than two million have stepped up in just this way. More than 130,000 are studying now. Ten thousand are starting every month. Can you afford to let another priceless hour pass without making your start toward something better? Here is all we ask—without obligation, mark and mail this coupon. It’s a little thing that takes but a moment, but it’s the most important thing you can do today. Do it now!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2182-B, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER | ☐ SALESMANSHIP |
| ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways | ☐ ADVERTISING |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Window Trimmer |
| ☐ Telegraph Engineer | ☐ Show Card Writer |
| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Sign Painter |
| ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER | ☐ Railroad Trainman |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ ILLUSTRATING |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Cartooning |
| ☐ Toolmaker | ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Private Secretary |
| ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER | ☐ BOOKKEEPER |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Stenographer and Typist |
| ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER | ☐ Cert. Public Accountant |
| ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER | ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER |
| ☐ Marine Engineer | ☐ Railway Accountant |
| ☐ Ship Draftsman | ☐ Commercial Law |
| ☐ ARCHITECT | ☐ GOOD ENGLISH |
| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Teacher |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ CIVIL SERVICE |
| ☐ Structural Engineer | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ PLUMBING and HEATING | ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING |
| ☐ Sheet Metal Worker | ☐ Auto Repairing |
| ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. | ☐ Navigation |
| ☐ CHEMIST | ☐ AGRICULTURE |
| ☐ Mathematics | ☐ Poultry Raising |
| | ☐ Spanish |
| | ☐ French |
| | ☐ Italian |

Name _____
 Present _____
 Occupation _____
 Street _____
 and No. _____
 City _____ State _____

Canadians may send this coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada 7-25-19

Classified Advertising continued from page 1, front section.

\$365.75 ONE DAY!

Ira Shook of Flint Did That Amount of Business in One Day

making and selling popcorn Crispettes with this machine. Profits \$269.00. Mullen of East Liberty bought two outfits recently, and is ready for third. Iwata, Calif., purchased outfit Feb. 1920. Since, has bought 10 more—his profits enormous. J. R. Bert, Ala., wrote: "Only thing I ever bought equipped advertisement to." J. M. Pattillo, Ocala, wrote: "Enclosed find money order to pay all my notes. Getting along fine. Crispette business all you claim and then some." John W. Culp, So. Carolina, writes: "Everything going lovely. The business section of this town covers two blocks. Crispette wrappers laying everywhere. It's a good old world after all!" Kellogg \$700 ahead end of second week. Mexner, Baltimore, 250 in one day. Perrin, 380 in one day. Baker, 3,000 packages, one day.



We Start You in Business

Little Capital, no experience, Teach you secret formula.

Build a Business of Your Own

The demand for Crispettes is enormous. A delicious food confection made without sugar. Write me. Get facts about an honorable business, which will make you independent. You can start right in your own town. Business will grow. You won't be scrambling and crowding for a job. You will have made your own place.

Profits \$1,000 a Month Easily Possible

Send post card for illustrated book of facts. Contains enthusiastic letters from others—shows their places of business, tells how to start, when to start, and all other information needed. It's free. Write now!

LONG EAKINS COMPANY

111 High Street

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO

21 JEWEL BURLINGTON WATCH



\$5.00 PER MONTH

The masterpiece of watch manufacture—adjusted to the second, positions, temperature and isochronism. Encased at factory into your choice of the exquisite new watch cases. The great Burlington Watch sent on simple request. Pay at the rate of \$5.00 a month. You get the watch at the lowest price at which the Burlington is sold.

Write Today See color illustrations of all newest designs in watches that you have to choose from. Name and address on a post card is enough. Write today.

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 951, 19th St. and Marshall
Blvd., Chicago, Illinois
Canadian Office: 338 Portage
Av., Winnipeg, Man.

WRITE A SONG

You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, Patriotic, or any subject and send words to me at once. I compose music and guarantee publication.

EDWARD TRENT, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago

GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

PLAYS, VAUDEVILLE ACTS, MONOLOGS, DIALOGS, Tableaux, Drills, Pageants, Musical Readings, Recitations, Special Entertainments. Make up Goods. Large Catalog Free. T. S. Denison & Co., Dept. 43, Chicago.

TRADE SCHOOLS

BE A SIGN PAINTER—Earn from \$25.00 to \$50.00 per week. Complete course \$15.00. Unrivalled opportunity Superior School of Art, Box 290, Kokomo, Indiana.

CHICAGO PAINTING SCHOOL. The only school in the U. S. teaching all branches Sign Painting, Show Card Writing, Paperhanging, Marbling, Gilding, Decorating, Auto Painting by Home Study or Resident Courses. Catalogue free. Chicago Painting School, 151 W. Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

TYPEWRITERS

TYPEWRITERS, SLIGHTLY USED. All well-known Standard Makes, with modern improvements. Guaranteed for 1 year. Remington, Underwood, L. C. Smith, etc. \$10 up. Wholesale and retail. Immediate shipment. Write for catalog at once. International Typewriter Exchange, 177-AA, N. State St., Chicago.

DEAFNESS

THE MEGA-EAR-PHONE

A Comfortable Invisible Ear Device

Non-Irritating - Not Metal - Not Wire - Not Rubber



The Mega-Ear-Phone will restore hearing by taking the place of Perforated, Punctured, Ruptured or destroyed Natural Eardrums. It permanently relieves Catarrhal Ears, Stagnant Head Noises. It is a device giving immediate results. The scientific triumph that helps nature restore hearing, when all other efforts have failed.

The Mega-Ear-Phone will HELP YOU Write for Booklet, describing Causes of Deafness, How and Why the Mega-Ear-Phone restores hearing.

THE MEGA-EAR-PHONE CO., Inc.
Dept. A, Suite 722 Perry Bldg., 16th & Chestnut Sts., Phila., Pa.

FREE TRIAL

Cut out this ad and mail it to us, with your name and address (no money); and we will send you our FAMOUS KARNAK RAZOR by return mail, postpaid. You may use the razor for 30 days FREE; then if you like it, pay us \$1.35. If you don't like it return it. SEND NO MONEY. MORE COMPANY, Dept. 453 St. Louis, Mo.



Learn Auto

and TRACTOR BUSINESS

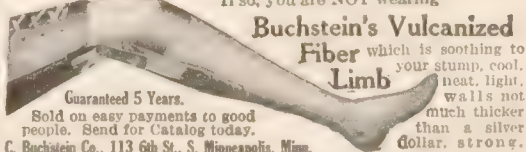
Earn \$150 to \$400 a Month

Thousands have learned herein in 6 to 8 weeks and are making big money as repair men, drivers, and superintendents. Many own garages making \$600 per month. Big Book Free.

RAHE SCHOOL, Dept. 2055
Kansas City, Mo. Cincinnati, O.

Does The Socket Chafe Your Stump?

If so, you are NOT wearing



Buchstein's Vulcanized Fiber which is soothing to your stump, cool, neat, light, walls not much thicker than a silver dollar, strong.

Guaranteed 5 Years.

Sold on easy payments to good people. Send for Catalog today.

C. Buchstein Co., 113 6th St., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

GET WELL BE YOUNG—GROW TALL



This University discovery is the most important health invention of the century. It remakes and rejuvenates the Human Body. It produces normal spines. It frees impinged and irritated nerves, cures contracted muscles, shortens ligaments, eliminates congestion, improves circulation and drainage of the body. It will increase the body's length. **THE PANDICULATOR CO., 3518 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, O.**

10c to 25c a Day Pays

For the Symphonola

Beautiful models in genuine Oak, Walnut, Mahogany—Handsomely finished. Compare tone, construction, price, terms, with higher priced phonographs. See the saving.



OVER 2 YEARS TIME
for the Beautiful Period Model here shown, 18 mos.—2 yrs. on other popular models. Convenient monthly payments. Enjoy your Symphonola while paying.

PLAYS ALL RECORDS
Using steel needles, as Symphonola, Victor, Columbia, Emerson, without expensive extra attachments; Pathe or Edison Records with sapphire or diamond points.

RECORDS 70c POSTPAID
Symphonola Records playable on any phonograph. Contain best of music. Get our latest Record list, and save money.

BEAUTIFUL BOOK FREE
Illustrates Symphonolas in natural colors. Full details, prices, terms, construction. A postal quickly brings it. Get your copy NOW—It's FREE.

Larkin Co Inc. Desk SAS-121, BUFFALO, N. Y.



If You Can Tell it from a GENUINE DIAMOND Send it back

To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND closely resembles a genuine diamond with same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in Ladies' Solitaire Ring (Cat. price \$4.98) for Half Price to introduce, \$2.63, or in Gents' Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. price \$6.26) for \$3.25. Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS. **SEND NO MONEY.** Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once C. O. D. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for Free Catalog. Agents Wanted.

MEXICAN DIAMOND IMPORTING CO. Dept. SS-2, Las Cruces, N. Mex.
(Exclusive controllers Mexican Diamonds)

\$17⁵⁰ ALL SUIT

WOOL

Made to your measure, payable after received.

Perfect fit, fine goods and tailoring, \$20 saving, **all guaranteed or no pay. SAMPLES FREE.** Every man should write at once for our beautiful free book of cloth samples and correct fashions, explaining everything. Write letter or postal; just say, "Send me your samples," and get everything by return mail FREE. Important to every man. Write today sure.

PARK TAILORING COMPANY
Dept D-2011, CHICAGO, ILL.



High School Course in Two Years!

You Want to Earn Big Money!

And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion.

Many business houses hire no men whose general knowledge is not equal to a high school course. Why? Because big business refuses to burden itself with men who are barred from promotion by the lack of elementary education.

Can You Qualify for a Better Position

We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. **YOU CAN DO IT.**

Let us show you how to get on the road to success. It will not cost you a single working hour. We are so sure of being able to help you that we will cheerfully return to you, at the end of ten lessons, every cent you sent us if you are not absolutely satisfied. What fairer offer can we make you? Write today. It costs you nothing but a stamp.

American School of Correspondence
Dept. H-15, Chicago, U. S. A.

American School of Correspondence,
Dept. H-15, Chicago, Ill.

Explain how I can qualify for positions checked.

.....Architect.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Lawyer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000
.....Building Contractor.	\$5,000 to \$10,000	Mechanical Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000
.....Automobile Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	Shop Superintendent.	\$3,000 to \$7,000
.....Automobile Repairman.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	Employment Manager.	\$4,000 to \$10,000
.....Civil Engineer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Steam Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
.....Structural Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	Foreman's Course.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
.....Business Manager.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Photoplay Writer.	\$2,000 to \$10,000
.....Certified Public Accountant.	\$7,000 to \$15,000	Sanitary Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$5,000
.....Accountant and Auditor.	\$2,500 to \$7,000	Telephone Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
.....Draftsman and Designer.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	Telegraph Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
.....Electrical Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	High School Graduate.	In two years.
.....General Education.	In one year.	Fire Insurance Expert.	\$3,000 to \$10,000

Name..... Address.....

Factory to Rider

Saves \$15 to \$25 on the model you select from 44 Styles, colors and sizes of Ranger bicycles. Delivered free on approval, **express pre-paid**, direct from the makers for **30 Days' Free Trial.** We pay return charges if not satisfactory.

12 Months to Pay Possession at once on our liberal year-to-pay plan. Any boy or girl can save the small monthly payments.

Tires wheels, chains, parts and equipment at half usual prices. **Big Ranger Catalog** FREE with marvelous new prices, 30 day trial offer and terms.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY Dept. S-30, Chicago, Ill.



Ask for Special Rider Agent plan to earn money.

Pay No Cash For This Wonderful Bargain

IN BLACK ONLY. Men's Extra High-grade Gunmetal Calf Blucher. Stylish, broad, comfortable last. Two full soles, all solid leather. Low broad heels, which will stay on, with plenty of room to give comfort. The picture shows you the style of the



No.
03360

shoe, but it cannot show you the good workmanship nor the smooth, comfort-giving quality of the leather. You must see the shoe to appreciate its value. We take the risk of pleasing. If they are not as good as shoes you pay \$8.00 and \$9.00 for send them back and we will gladly refund your money. Sizes 6 to 11.

\$5.45
Parcel Post Free

Genuine Goodyear Welt.

Send For Free Catalog.

Simply Send Name and Size

UNDERPRICED MAIL ORDER HOUSE, F. Haverhill, Mass.

Send me.....pairs of this wonderful shoe, sizes.....C. O. D. I shall accept them under your "Iron-clad Guarantee" to return every cent if unsatisfactory.

Name.....

Address.....



LEARN MUSIC AT HOME

Piano, Organ, Violin, Cornet, Guitar, Banjo, Mandolin, Harp, Cello, Trombone, Flute, Clarinet, Piccolo, Saxophone, Ukelele, Sight Singing, Harmony

and Composition, Hawaiian Steel Guitar, Tenor Banjo, Drum and Traps.

Don't Be a "Wall Flower" No longer need the ability to play be shut out of your life. Just mail coupon or postal to-day for our new Free Book. Let us tell you how you can easily, quickly, thoroughly learn to play your favorite musical instrument by note in your own home, without a teacher, by our New Improved Home Study Method. Different, easier than private teacher way—no tiresome, dry exercises—no inconvenience, no trick music, no "numbers," yet simple, wonderful, amazingly easy for a mere child.

SPECIAL OFFER

We therefore offer our marvelous lessons and charge only for postage and sheet music. Beginners or advanced pupils. Get all the proof, facts, letters from pupils. **AMAZING OFFER** and fascinating New Book just issued. **ALL FREE!** Write postal to-day. **Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.**

We want to have **ONE PUPIL IN EACH LOCALITY AT ONCE** to help advertise our wonderful, easy system of teaching music.

U. S. School of Music
721 Brunswick Bldg., New York:

Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," and particulars of your special offer.

Name.....
Please print name

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, 721 Brunswick Bldg., New York

Address.....

City..... State.....



*Knowing how
wins on
Pay Day*

Pay-Raising BOOKS

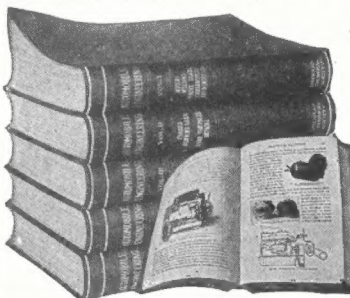
Select From This List for
Free Use in Your Own Home

Accountancy and Business Management, 7 vol., 2700 pages, 1000 pictures. Was \$52.50	Now \$29.80
Carpentry and Contracting, 5 volumes, 2138 pages, 1000 pictures. Was \$37.50	Now 24.80
Civil Engineering, 9 volumes, 3900 pages, 3000 pictures. Was \$67.50. Now	39.80
Electrical Engineering, 8 volumes, 4100 pages, 3300 pictures. Was \$60.00. Now	34.80
Automobile Engineering, 6 volumes, 2600 pages, 2000 pictures. Was \$45.00	Now 29.80
Machine Shop Practice, 6 vol., 2300 pages, 2500 pictures. Was \$45. Now	29.80
Steam and Gas Engineering, 7 vol., 3500 pages, 2500 pictures. Was \$52.50. Now	29.80
Law and Practice (with reading course), 13 volumes, 6000 pages, illustrated. Was \$97.50.	Now 49.80
Fire Prevention and Insurance, 4 volumes, 1500 pages, 600 pictures. Was \$30.00	Now 19.80
Telephony and Telegraphy, 4 volumes, 1728 pages, 2000 pictures. Was \$30.00	Now 19.80
Sanitation, Heating and Ventilating, 4 vol., 1454 pages, 1400 pictures. Was \$30	Now 18.80
Drawing, 4 volumes, 1578 pages, 1000 pictures, blueprints, etc. Was \$30.00	Now 19.80

SPECIAL With each set of these books goes a one-year membership in our society. This entitles you to consult our engineers and experts on any subject connected with your work FREE. This membership usually sells for \$12.00.

KNOWING HOW is the thing that puts the big pay in the pay-envelope. It's the thing that lifts men out of a poor-paying job into a man's size job with a man's size pay. *The man with the "know how" under his hat always wins out.* No matter what kind of work you are doing, or what you expect to do—you can learn more about that work and get more money for doing it. You don't have to go to school. Neither do you take any special training. One of these home study courses in book form gives you all the "know how" you need.

Some of the world's greatest experts prepared these books just to help ambitious men get ahead. They are written in plain, good old U. S. language that anyone can understand. No puzzling technical terms. Everything is explained. Thousands of pictures, plans, blueprints, diagrams, etc., in each set. Over 100,000 sets have been sold. Pick out a set in line with your ambition and send the FREE TRIAL coupon that brings the books without your sending any money in advance.



This picture shows the Automobile Engineering Books, five volumes closed and one open. The bindings will last a lifetime.

FREE Examination!

Don't send one penny. Just fill out the coupon and mail it. This will bring any set you select (the whole set, not a sample) by express collect. The books will be yours to use as you please for an entire week. You be the judge and decide whether or not they will do for you what they have done for thousands of other men. If you don't think they will help you, send them back at our expense and you won't owe a cent.

75 Cents a Week

Pay only \$2.50 within 1 week if you keep the books and send us \$3 each month until the special reduced price is paid. This amounts to about 10 cents a day. Mail coupon NOW. You'll be mighty glad you did when pay day comes 'round.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. X-161, Chicago

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. X-161, Chicago, U. S. A.

Please send me set of
for 7 DAYS' examination, shipping charges, collect. I will examine the books thoroughly and, if satisfied, will send \$2.50 within 7 days and \$3.00 each month until I have paid the special price of \$..... If I decide not to keep the books I will return them within a week at your expense.

Name.....

Address.....

Reference.....

Please fill out all lines.

Gua...bor



ONLY
\$1.00
DOWN

Send coupon with \$1.00 for this Wonder Pure Aluminum Set. Extra heavy weight 99.4% pure aluminum. Absolutely guaranteed. Seamless, sanitary, easy to clean. *Guaranteed for 20 years.* It will not flake, chip, peel or corrode—heats quickly and evenly and saves fuel. All pieces except the pie plates and bread pans are buffed and polished to mirror-like brilliancy. Shipped direct to you for 30 days' trial on our special offer. The only way to appreciate this wonderful bargain is to see and use this set. Let us ship it to you right away. Only \$1.00 down—then \$2.50 per month—total price \$23.85. Send coupon now.

This Wonder Set consists of:—1½ quart extra heavy paneled rice boiler (3 pieces); 6 quart extra heavy paneled tea kettle (2 pieces) with flat metal "stay-placed" handle and cocobolo finished metal tipped grip; 9 cup percolator (4 pieces). Has welded spout and cocobolo grip handle; 3 quart extra heavy, lipped sauce pan; 4 quart covered convex sauce pot (2 pieces), extra heavy, buffed and polished. Has "stay-placed" handle and cocobolo finished grip; 1 quart lipped sauce pan, extra heavy gauge, rimmed edge. 2, 9-inch seamless pie plates; 2, 9½-inch seamless bread pans with rounded corners; 10½-inch extra heavy lipped fry pan with rimmed edge; and our special 9 piece com-

ination Roaster Set. This wonderful combination set gives you practically every utensil needed to do your cooking, roasting, baking and frying. While it consists of 9 actual pieces, these pieces are so formed and fitted that they may be converted into the following utensils: A self-basting roaster, a double boiler; cereal cooker or triple steamer; an egg poacher that poaches 5 eggs at one time; a muffin pan biscuit baker with 5 custard or jelly moulds; a bread or bake pan; a pudding pan; a mixing bowl; and a stew pan. The entire set consists of 27 actual pieces. Shipping weight about 15 pounds. Order by No. A-121. Send for this set today.

L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. 1451, Chicago
Enclosed is \$1.00. Send me your Wonder Aluminum Set No. A-121 on 30 days' free trial. If satisfied I will pay the balance at \$2.50 per month. If not, I will return the set to you and you will immediately refund my \$1.00 and freight charges both ways.
No. A-121—\$1.00 down, \$2.50 per month. Complete price \$23.85

Name.....

Address.....

Post Office.....State.....

If you only want Furniture, Rug, Stove, Phonograph, Watch, and General Household Catalog, put X in box ☐

Send Coupon

Don't miss out on this big bargain. Don't put off sending for this Wonder set at this very low price. Make your kitchen work a pleasure. Send this coupon now—**TODAY.**



L. FISH FURNITURE CO.
Dept. 1451 CHICAGO

Money Back If Not Satisfied

30 days' free trial in your own kitchen. If satisfied pay balance at only \$2.50 per month. If not, return to us and we will refund your \$1.00 and freight charges both ways.